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John and the Demijohn;

A TEMPERANCE TALE.

BY

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AUTHOR OF "ALMOST A NUN," "GOLDEN LIBRARY,"
"OUR CHATHAM STREET UNCLE," ETC.



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CHAPTER I.

John's First Acquaintance with the Demijohn.





CHAPTER I.

John's First Acquaintance with the Demijohn.



JOHN came into the hall with three feathers in his hand—Nick, the hired boy, had stolen them from the rooster's tail. The feathers in-

spired John with an idea. John, to use his

own description of himself, “was a boy in petti-skirts ;” he had not yet attained the halcyon age of five years, the period of small trousers and dawning manhood ! He took his Scotch cap from the rack and put in the tail feathers, all awry ; he took his father’s cane for a horse, and went out the front door, intent on a peregrination of the gravel walks. It was June, warm, sunny, flowery, fragrant. John was inspired by the beauty of the occasion,—a beauty he was too juvenile to appreciate. Agatha appreciated it—she was John’s half-sister, a damsel of sixteen, and sat in the bay window of the sitting room, sewing ; the window was open, and, as the soft-breathing wind carried off the blossoms of the flowering-almond, now come to their decadence, it floated the pink and white shower to her feet.

Agatha was disposed to be poetical ; she thought in rhymes and numbers of the glow-

ing beauty all about her: she was also disposed to be practical, and she was darning stockings; and on the chair before her were her own finished hose, folded up in the most approved fashion, and she was now busy with the gay striped cotton affairs, whose office it was to decorate John's plump legs. Agatha's work-basket was in perfect order: in the various pockets were her different kinds of work; there was a shuttle of tatting, a roll of cambric embroidery partly finished, a web of knit lace, and a kerchief ready for hemming. As she sat at her housewifely task, her eyes cast down on her work, her rounded cheek pink with youth and health, and her silken hair smoothly banded about her head, she was pretty, womanly, winning.

John, having made nearly one circuit of the family mansion, stopped in front of the bay window.

“Good morning, Miss Stafford! hope you’re well!”

“And what fine gentleman is this?” asked Agatha, intent on darning basket-stitch.

“I’m Doctor Hathway.”

“Oh, but I never saw Doctor Hathway with feathers in his hat,” said Agatha. “Aren’t you Ralph Curtis, out on training day?”

“No: I’m Doctor, on my horse,” said John: “only I thought I’d like to be better looking than he is; so I put in the feathers.”

“That was a grand idea,” said Agatha, looking up; “the old doctor certainly would be improved by more beauty — John! I believe you’ve been trampling on my flower-beds!”

“I never!” asseverated John.

“Be sure you don’t then,” said Agatha; That one upward look altered her whole face; she was striking rather than pretty, with a will of her own, evidently, and a mine of reserved strength to be used upon necessity.

John cantered off; his feet rang once,

twice, before the bay window ; then he came no more—John had found other entertainment. In fact, he had passed the store-room. The cook, having been there for flour, had left the door open, from a habit seemingly inherent in the maid-servant race. The cool stone floor, the dim light, attracted John, and he stole in.

There was the sugar-barrel ; but, as John's nose barely reached its rim, he could bring no plunder up from its luscious depths ; there were flour-barrel, soap-box, meal-chest—he cared for none of these things. Lo a box of raisins, and little pots of jelly, and jars of cinnamon and clove ; but high up out of the small intruder's reach. There was the cake-can, but the hasp hurt his fingers. John knew an appeal to any of the powers that were in the establishment, would bring him something from *that* can. He might have gone his way in peace ; but just before him

stood a huge wicker-basket, curiously shaped like a bottle. It had a handle, was crested at the neck with a rim of dark-green glass, and had a big, dark, delightful looking cork. John tugged the cork out: it was wet, as if the basket-bottle were full; and, when John put the cork to his nose, it was cold, and did not smell at all amiss.

“ Hoh ! ” said John, dropping the cork, and, pushing his finger as far down into the bottle as possible, brought it up dripping, ready to go into his mouth.

He did not really like the taste of the newly discovered liquid; indeed he made a fearful face over it: but the present performance was quite new, and so deliciously sly, that the “ stolen waters ” were pleasant enough for him to try them again and again; and he became so intent that he did not hear an approaching step. That step was Agatha’s.

To Agatha sewing had come faint odors as from Araby the blest,—spicy whiffs of nutmeg, mace, and allspice; hints of lemon and vanilla; and a breath of coolness, as from cellar or storeroom.

Agatha, alert for the good of the household, organized an exploring expedition, and discovered John and the demijohn.

Agatha put the cork in the rim of the green glass with some violence, and saying, “Shame, shame, bad boy!” administered several slaps to John, which caused him to run off screaming, leaving the discarded cane for Agatha to put up. John had meant to fly with his grievances to Nick, the boy; but, on his way, he overtook a bush of green gooseberries, and, after that, was beguiled into the barn by the sunlight streaming on the floor, the tempting softness of the mow, and the bustle and clucking of the fowls. In ten minutes his misadventure with Agatha was forgotten.

Meanwhile Agatha looked indignation at the demijohn. "How I hate you!" she said, giving it a push with the toe of her slipper. "If I had my way, you wouldn't be in the house." Then she went back to her sewing; but the current of her thoughts ran smoothly no longer: it was ruffled, and her fancies ceased flowing in rhythm.

Sara, the chambermaid, came by the room with her duster. "How is mother's head now, Sara?" asked Agatha.

"She's asleep," replied Sara.

"Then she's better. I'm glad of that," said Agatha; and, the stockings being finished and put away, she went out for a bouquet for the dinner-table.

Agatha was really fond of her step-mother. The present Mrs. Stafford had come to the house when Agatha was ten years old. At that period Agatha was existing under the sway of a good-natured, old-fashioned, fussy,

housekeeper, who continually and ignorantly outraged the child's sense of beauty and fitness. The housekeeper dressed Agatha in dark frocks, brown calico aprons, of an obsolete cut, long and plain pantalettes, and hideous sun-bonnets. Agatha liked to remember how the new mother had won her everlasting gratitude by taking these matters in hand. How had she bought her a charming cottage-bonnet, trimmed with rosebuds ; how, under the fingers she loved to watch at the kindly task, had those odious pantalettes become of suitable length, and nice in tucks and edging ! Had not the step-mother said that Agatha must wear to school nothing plainer than ruffled white aprons ? and from the first week of her advent until now, had not Agatha's wardrobe hung full of pretty dresses ? Nor was this the sum of Mrs. Stafford's good deeds. When John made his appearance in the family, he had been very

liberally presented to Agatha, and Agatha had named him, and had selected his coats and caps, and had sought out new styles of making his dresses, and had received his picture painted on ivory and set in a gold rim for a breast-pin ; and a lock of his yellow hair twisted about a handsome ring, as another keepsake of the interesting little brother. Since her father's second marriage, Agatha had kept her birthday, had known what Christmas was, had parties of her young friends to visit her, and owned a pony to ride.

Agatha had strong affections, and her stepmother and new brother called them out to the full : she thought John the smartest, sweetest, handsomest child in these United States, and had fully resolved that she should one day see him in the presidential chair. Her tenderness might have been more drawn out to John, from the fact that thereafter

the little ones that were born in the family drifted out of life with but a few hours' experience of its bitter sweetness; and, as there were small graves and smaller coffins in the "Stafford lot" at the cemetery, Agatha and John grew up in the household together, only sister and brother.

On the day when Agatha had slapped John on account of his new acquaintance in the store-room, Mrs. Stafford's early headache had so far removed that she was able to come down to dinner.

"I am glad to see that you are better," said Mr. Stafford.

"I took some 'sling' and had a nap, and it cured me: it always does," said the lady.

She was a very pretty, fair, tastily dressed woman, one of the weaker sisters, evidently; but those were days when the weaker sisters were in the ascendant: rum and other evils had not yet made it necessary to develop strong-minded women.

When dessert arrived, Mr. Stafford tasted his pudding, tasted again, and looked inquiry at his wife. Mrs. Stafford took a disapprobative spoonful of the dainty looking concoction.

“What is wrong with the pudding?” asked Mr. Stafford.

“I think it is a very good pudding,” said Agatha, smartly; “and it is a very expensive pudding: it took any amount of eggs, lemons, and loaf-sugar.”

“It is some of Agatha’s work,” said Mrs. Stafford, with a sigh of martyrdom, “and she has left out what I always put in,—a glass of the best apple whiskey.”

“Agatha,” said her father, passing his plate for a second instalment of the offending dish, “when you undertake to make anything, you should forget none of the ingredients.”

“I didn’t forget,” said Agatha. “I left the whiskey out on purpose.”

“And why?” asked Mr. Stafford, regarding his daughter with a curious smile, while his wife sighed again.

“Because,” said Agatha, “I hate the stuff. It does more harm than good; we use it, and so lead other people to abuse it. We ought all to be down on it.”

“Down on it is unladylike; sounds like a boy,” said Mrs. Stafford, mildly.

“We ought all to be *down on it*,” persisted Agatha, who gloried in being before her age in her opinions, “that we might discourage the wickedness that is increasing from the use of liquor.”

“The Bible,” said Mr. Stafford, laughing, “is not down on the use of liquors. What does Wisdom cry aloud but—‘Come eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled’? What do you make of Wisdom’s invitation, Agatha?”

“Mingled with *water*, I suppose,” retorted

Agatha. Wisdom was most likely wise enough to mingle in water for safety, while she kept the wine for fashion.”

“It *is* the fashion,” said Mrs. Stafford, “and, if you act against it, you will be called *singular*.”

“I like to be called *singular*; I positively enjoy it,” said Agatha, briskly.

“Be as *singular* as you please,” said her father; “but not about my pudding. My depraved appetite demands the flavor of the apple whiskey.”

“If I were grand potentate of these dominions,” said Agatha, “I would banish every drop of whiskey and distilled liquor.”

“It is a blessing to you,” said her father, “that there was no such law forty years ago. Your grandfather made his fortune — this house and grounds, and my bank-stock, mind you — most of it out of a distillery; and *he* was an office-bearer in the church, and died

in all the odor of sanctity. What will you say to *that*?"

"Quote you a verse out of my Sunday-school lesson," said Agatha. "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent."

"What in the world are you doing with your pocket-book?" said Mr. Stafford, for Agatha had opened the article in question, and was sniffing at it suspiciously.

"You told me where the money came from, and I am seeing if it smells of its base origin; I think it does. I recommend fumigation: it has a flavor of whiskey, this pocket-book;" and she turned to the mantle, and, striking a match and lighting a twisted paper, she solemnly proceeded to smoke her pocket-book.

"How can you be so absurd, Agatha?" said Mrs. Stafford, while John shouted to see the writhing paper and slow wreaths of ascending smoke.

Mr. Stafford evinced no displeasure at this reflection on his ancestral money; he was amused by Agatha. Domestic life solely with Mrs. Stafford might have been insipid: with Agatha there was always a tang of expectancy — a spicy flavor — that very likely was to Mr. Stafford more tolerable in his daughter than it would have been in his wife.

After dinner, when Mrs. Stafford was seated in the parlor, and Agatha had entered that sanctum also, in all the glory of her afternoon toilet, Mrs. Stafford proceeded to favor the young lady with some matenal counsels. “How can you say and think such nonsense about a little liquor, Agatha? ‘Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving.’”

“I do not consider whiskey a creature of God: strong drink is a device of the devil.”

“Shame, Agatha!” gasped Mrs. Stafford.

“I will receive the stuff with thanksgiving as it is in its original, God-designated condition, as intact in apples, rye, grapes, sugar-cane, corn, and so on ; but, as it is tortured out and compounded and vitiated by man, I abhor and reject it.”

“On the same principle you will receive meat with thanksgiving as God made it in fat sheep and beeves,” said Mrs. Stafford ; “but not as disorganized and compounded by butcher and cook.”

“That is not a parallel case,” said Agatha. “What harm have beef and mutton cooked or uncooked ever done ?”

“And what harm has whiskey ever done, used moderately ? It is of fine flavor for food, and is an admirable medicine,” persisted Mrs. Stafford.

“But how many do *not* use it in moderation, and so suffer from it !” said Agatha.

“I am not responsible for that,” said Mrs.

Stafford. “Am I never to use my tongue, because my neighbor uses *his* tongue for swearing?”

“But when we see what harm strong drink does — and think if it should work its ruin some day in *our* house!” began Agatha.

“*Our* house! Nonsense, child. Why, I like the taste of liquor,—I detest beer or porter; but good brandy, whiskey, or champagne, I really like — and how very ridiculous to suppose that, because I like the taste, and use it as occasion demands, I shall ever use it to my detriment, or that my family will either!”

“But you know it is said the predilection of the mother becomes the passion of the child. If our John — ”

“Our John! Why, Agatha Stafford, how can you say such a thing!”

“I have good cause to think and say such things,” said Agatha. “Did not my Uncle

Archie die a drunkard ? and *he* had been one of the finest and most scholarly young men in New York ; and did not his mother die of a broken heart for him ? And did not my Aunt Lucy's husband lead her a miserable life, and throw her with care and misery into a consumption, and finally break his own neck by falling down an open well when he was drunk ? Mrs. Lawyer Hanson sits up until midnight for her rioting husband to come home ; two of my Sunday school class have drunken fathers ; and, in fact, mother, I cannot think of one family of my acquaintance which, in some shape or other, rum has not touched."

" Your mother's family was unfortunate in that respect," conceded Mrs. Stafford ; " but that is no reason you should have a mania about it. Young ladies should never be extreme in anything, Agatha ; it does not look well. Now, child, when are you going to begin your music again ? "

“Never. I do not like music,” said Agatha the positive.

“Not like music? Nonsense!”

“I don’t,” said Agatha. “I have no ability to succeed in it, and I never like what I cannot do myself.”

“If you cannot play, what will you ever do in society?” said Mrs. Stafford.

“I’m going to learn to talk,” said Agatha, —“to talk agreeably, and disagreeably.”

“That last will be no accomplishment,” said her mother.

“If you talk disagreeably, people listen from curiosity to hear what ugly thing one will say next,” said Agatha, merrily.

“Willing to have snakes and toads hop out of your mouth just to see people stare at them!”

“I saw that at the Whiskey Convention, Friday.”

“Whiskey Convention! What in the world — !”

“The Ladies’ Society, may it please you,” said Agatha, sweeping a courtesy.

“Shame on you, Agatha! What a name for the Sewing Society!”

“To hear them, you’d think they came together just to cry up the merits of King Whiskey. Listen, mother;” and Agatha, an admirable mimic, began changing her voice, and twisting her face to suit different speakers. “Sairy’s baby has the colic so, I give it gin-sling; it’s the *best* thing — hot and pretty strong!”

“Old Mrs. Krebb, true enough,” cried Mrs. Stafford, laughing.

“Peter’s got the rheumatism, and he uses salt and brandy; it is better than *any* liniment.”

“That’s Mrs. Biggs.”

“Amelia’s appetite is very poor. I give her egg and brandy every morning. If your Louisa’s side isn’t better, hot whiskey is an

excellent bathe for it'—there's Mrs. Harrison. 'Uncle Hawthorn is taking rum and honey for his cough, and it helps him *so* much'—Mrs. Green. 'I don't think I could live without rye whiskey and wormwood bitters every morning'—Mrs. Sage. 'I believe rhubarb steeped in alcohol saved my Tommy's life'—that's Mrs. Lucy. I wont take you off, mother."

"You'll never succeed in life if you get a hobby like this," said Mrs. Stafford, amid her laughter.

One of Mrs. Stafford's cardinal doctrines was that every young lady must succeed in life—i. e. marry early, to good position and property. A minor matter, which she sometimes mentioned, was religion. She was herself a church member, and had, thus far, during her life, maintained a respectable standing in the body of Christians to which she belonged. She went to church and to

sewing society, gave to the regular contributions, and thought herself quite exemplary.

It was Agatha's vacation now, and she was at home almost constantly. One afternoon, Uncle Jerry came in to see them. Uncle Jerry was short and fat; indeed, he was bloated by liquor to an immensity. His head was bald, his small light eyes could hardly be seen in the general glow of his visage; he was puffing now in the summer afternoon heat and exercise. He wore a white linen suit, a wide shirt collar, no necktie, and had white canvas slippers on his huge feet. He wiped his face several times on a blue silk kerchief, asked John for a fan, complimented Agatha and her mother on their appearance, said the garden looked like Paradise, thought he should go to Spitzbergen to spend the next summer, etc.

“Won't you have a glass of ice-water, Uncle Jerry?” said Mrs. Stafford.

“Ice-water! no, thank you, it’s unhealthy; but I *will* have something cool. Fannie, let’s have a glass of egg-nog.”

“Well,” said Mrs. Stafford, “only I’m too lazy to make it.”

“Agatha’ll make it for us; won’t you, Ag?” said Uncle Jerry.

Agatha threw back her head, and stared stonily at Uncle Jerry.

“No: *she* won’t,” said Mrs. Stafford; “she is a perfect fanatic about such things, thinks a drop of liquor poisonous.”

“Pooh-oo-oo,” puffed Uncle Jerry. “Well, I’ll make it, Agatha; go get me the groceries necessary: won’t you?”

Agatha still gazed unflinching.

“Don’t gaze at me so. You’d do to sit for the Sphinx. Am I the desert that thou, O Sphinx art staring at? I’m as dry as a desert; that’s what I want the egg-nog for. Ho! Sara.”

Uncle Jerry yelled out these last words in a voice that caused Mrs. Stafford to put her fingers in her ears; but he succeeded in bringing Sara from the kitchen.

“Sara,” said Uncle Jerry, “bring me a cup of loaf sugar, a cup of good apple whiskey, a nutmeg, an egg, a spoon, a pitcher, some ice, and so forth. Sara, you know what is needful for making egg-nog, and there’s to buy you a new ribbon;” and he filliped a silver quarter at her across the table. Sara soon brought in a salver with the articles Uncle Jerry had demanded, and the toper began to prepare his treat.

“Ah, this will cool us off, nicely,” he said.

“Last winter you called for such things to keep you warm: now you want them to keep you cool,” said Agatha.

“That’s the advantage of whiskey. Now, Ag, here’s a conundrum for you, a real

Scriptural one. Why is whiskey like the Apostle Paul? Give it up, eh? Well here goes an answer. 'Because it is all things to all men.' Ha, ha."

"That is poor enough to be worthy of its origin," said Agatha.

Uncle Jerry had finished his labors at the tray, and had ready two glasses over which the frothed egg rose roundly.

"That looks well and tastes well," said he. "Here, Fanny; try this for a hot day. Ah, there's John; come here, my lad, and have a sip. I'll warrant *you* know what's good."

"It's horrid, John; don't touch it," said Agatha.

"Don't put notions in the child's head," said his mother; "it won't hurt him;" and John, looking first at his sister, and then at his old uncle, advanced slowly toward the proffered glass. Agatha sprang up, caught him in her arms, and saying, "Come, John,

I'm going to the store to buy peanut candy," carried him off.

"She'll make a fool of that boy," said Uncle Jerry, "if she goes on in that way."

"I know it," sighed Mrs. Stafford; "but she is so wilful."

"It is positively wicked to act so," said Uncle Jerry. "Every creature of God is good, and not to be despised, if it be received."

"Oh, yes: I know that; but it is no use to tell Agatha so," interrupted Mrs. Stafford; "she always has an answer ready."

Agatha could not always carry her small brother off when he was in danger of pursuing his acquaintance with strong drink. For instance, November brought his fifth birthday, and the embryo man appeared at dinner with a new blue suit of trowsers and jacket, his hair curled in a crest atop his head, and a fine hemstitched ruffle about his neck. His father was highly delighted.

“Now we have a boy for certain,” he said; and, when the mince-pie and apples came on the table, he bade Sara bring the decanter and glasses, that they might drink the health of the heir of the house.

“Don’t give him any, father,” said Agatha, as her father poured one of the slender glasses half full for Master John.

“Agatha, I’m ashamed of your nonsense,” said Mr. Stafford, impatiently, and gave his wife and son each a glass. “Here, daughter, drink your brother’s health, and lay by your foolishness.”

“In water, and may he never love anything stronger,” said Agatha.

John took a big swallow from his glass, tears came into his eyes, he made a horrific face; his father laughed. John took a second gulp.

“He’s a real little man,” said his mother.

“It’s bad; isn’t it, John?” said Agatha.

“Yes,” nodded John. “I can drink it, though,” he added, and drained the last drop that had been given him; then, catching fast hold of his tingling nose, he said, “It’s most awful funny stuff!”

Agatha ran up-stairs and cried.

John was as cross as a little bear all the afternoon.

At Mrs. Stafford’s table wine sauce was plenty; tipsy cake, wine syllabub, and wine puddings often appeared; there was brandy in the mince pie, brandy cheese, and brandy peaches; and on Christmas, following roast pig and roast turkey, came a high dish of lemon punch.

If John got cold, he had a cup of hot punch to sweat his cold off; if his stout legs were full of growing pains, they were rubbed with hot whiskey; if he ate nuts enough to make him uncomfortable, he had a swallow of burnt brandy; and when he said an extra

good lesson, he got a frosted sponge cake with a spoonful of wine jelly.

In vain Agatha told him horrible tales of drunken fathers, who destroyed the peace of their families ; of little fair-faced boys, who grew to be wicked, tipsy men, and lay in gutters ; of sisters, who saw their brothers laid by rum in shameful graves ; of mothers, whose sons broke their hearts by being drunkards.

“Don’t you think I’ll ever do so, Agatha. I’ll be a doctor like Doctor Hathway ; and you and I’ll have splendid times—I never ! Do I look like those bad folks ?”

“No ; not now ; but, never to be like them, never touch wine or whiskey.”

“Hoh ! why, they taste just as bad ; but I don’t care. I can take them right down, if the tears *do* come. Agatha, mother takes ‘em, and father takes ‘em, and Uncle Jerry takes ‘em, and they ain’t drunkards. You see, Agatha, if I ever am. No, sir !”

So time passed on. John grew to be a stout, handsome, lively boy; he was the idol of the household. Agatha delighted in his progress in his studies, and in his active, ardent spirit; he could shoot, fish, hunt, swim with the boldest; and boyish, sports over, he would sit, his hands clenched in his fair, thick curls, his elbows on the table, his eyes eagerly devouring some book of travels or adventure; or equally eager in studying out some knotty example in arithmetic, or pondering deep facts of natural science.

In these years Agatha had left school, matured into a brilliant woman; her father was proud of her; her mother a little in awe of her; and Agatha was indisputably the leading spirit of the handsome, sleepy, wealthy old town where they lived.

Ralph Curtis came very often to Mr. Stafford's. He brought Agatha books, choice plants; he went out with her on long, wild

dashes on horseback, wherein Agatha taunted him with her faster riding, and came racing home all rosy with exercise and laughter, quarter of a mile ahead of her escort. If there was a lecture or a concert, there Ralph proudly accompanied Agatha; and sometimes Agatha was gracious and sometimes she was distant; but father, mother, and John were all on the side of Ralph Curtis.

“I’m sure, Agatha,” said Mrs. Stafford, “you might be a little more condescending to Ralph. Don’t you like him?”

“Yes, a little,” admitted Agatha.

“But you might like him a great deal if you tried,” said her mother.

“But I am not sure of him,” said Agatha.

“Not sure of him!” cried her mother, “Why, he is devoted to you, if he might only say so.”

“Oh, I didn’t mean *that* at all,” said Agatha, flushing crimson. “I meant that I

am not sure of his moral character. I must be as sure of his strength and trust and worthiness, as I am of my own, before I like him," and Agatha threw back her head proudly. She was satisfied with herself. Storms of trouble should yet show Agatha her weakness, and that in God alone is strength.

Agatha had seen Ralph drink wine at parties, as did most other young men; she had seen him often take a social glass with her father; moreover Uncle Jerry said he was a jolly young dog, with no nonsense about him; and this most of all made Agatha suspicious of him.

Thus Agatha continued her calm course, apparently immovable, and untouched by common sublunary things; reviewing in John's advancement her own earlier studies; her firm hand grasping more and more the reins of power at her father's house, as

silently and unaccountably they were dropping from her mother's hold; and Ralph Curtis had strong faith in good luck and time and perseverance, and came and came again, unasked and yet unhindered.

One day, as John came bounding home from the "Academy," he met Ralph Curtis coming out of a saloon.

"Ho, Ralph," said John, and ran on.

"Hullo, you John, come back!" cried Ralph.

John returned, and Ralph, laying his hand confidentially on his shoulder, said, "John, my lad, don't you tell Agatha you met me coming out of that," and he motioned to the saloon.

"Why not?" said John, with wide open eyes.

"Oh, she don't believe in such things, you know; and I don't want her saying all sorts of queer things when I come up there to-night."

“I won’t tell her then,” said John, very kindly.

“Good for you. Step in here with me; I buy these traps once in a while,” said Ralph; and he took John into a confectioner’s establishment.

“Half a pound of your best,” said he to the clerk. He did not wish to give John a parcel that might attract Agatha’s notice or questions.

The clerk knowing Ralph’s taste, put up the required amount of “brandy bottles,” small sugar bottles, each full of liquor.

Ralph handed them over, without noticing, to John, who, being but eleven years old, was not above this style of bribe, or reward of merit. John went home styling Ralph “a good fellow.”

Now, of all things, John was not selfish; and, when he found his sister stitching a collar for him, he thrust his hand into his ample pocket, and brought up some of the

contents of his paper, saying, "Have some candy, Agatha?"

Agatha carelessly put it into her mouth. As soon as she discovered what manner of candy it was, she cried out, "Where did you get that?"

"Ralph Curtis gave 'em to me," said unwary John.

"Give them to me," said his sister.

John gave her some more.

"All of them," said Agatha, impatiently.

"That's asking too much of a fellow," said John. "If you want a whole lot, Ralph will give 'em to you, if you say so; he's coming up to-night."

Agatha felt tempted to treat John to a slap, as she had over the demijohn; but the days of such doings were gone by: so she said, "Don't eat them, John dear; they are full of brandy, and not fit for you."

"I like 'em, good," said John, putting two in his mouth.

“ Give them to me, and I’ll buy you a pound of sugar-almonds.”

But John was high spirited, and “ not tied to Ag’s apron-string,” he assured himself, as he refused the almonds, and went on eating brandy-bottles. At supper-time he could not eat, and said he had a headache.

“ It seems to be an epidemic,” said his father ; “ your mother is laid up with one, too.”

“ John has been eating poison, that Ralph Curtis gave him. I hope Ralph will come here to-night,” said Agatha, setting her teeth, and flashing from her eyes looks ominous of evil to her admirer.

“ Poison !” cried John. “ Hear her talk ; just there, father !” and he drew his last three brandy-bottles from his pocket.

Mr. Stafford took one, smacked his lips, and tried another.

“ How many of these things have you

eaten?" he asked, looking curious and smiling at his son.

"I had half a pound," said John; "and I gave *her* five or six, and she broke 'em up; and here's this one, all that's left."

"Half a pound! Why, boy, you need not be a glutton. No wonder your head aches; there's sugar enough in half a pound of them to make you sick if you eat it too fast. Come now, I prescribe for your illness that you take a bath and get to bed. Another time don't eat candy so greedily."

"Sugar enough in them!" cried Agatha, as the door closed on her brother. "There's enough of the strongest kind of brandy in them to make him drunk."

"Don't be too hard on the child for eating a little candy," said her father.

After tea, Agatha went up-stairs. John had gone to bed, and was tossing about, groaning with headache. "Poor boy," sighed

Agatha, as she stood in his door a moment; then she went away.

Tears rolled down John's ruddy cheeks; he was sick, his mother was sick, Agatha was angry and had left him alone. But Agatha was soon back with a bowl of vinegar, a brush, and a soft cloth. She sat down on the side of the bed, and began to bathe John's forehead, and dampen and brush his hot head. Under her gentle touch he became soothed.

"I'm sorry I ate the things," he said humbly.

"Never touch them again," said Agatha. It is one of Satan's ways to make boys drunkards."

"I won't be a drunkard," said John. "I don't really like the taste of liquor; but I get it in so many ways, I'm sort of used to it. I'll never get drunk, Agatha, — never."

He fell asleep. Agatha sat in painful

reverie. Sara looked in. "Miss Agatha, Mr. Curtis is in the parlor." Agatha washed the vinegar from her hands, while downstairs Mr. Stafford was saying, "You'll get it hot and heavy, Ralph, for giving John those brandy-bottles."

Sure enough, Agatha was distant and imperial indeed. "How dare you give my brother such things?"

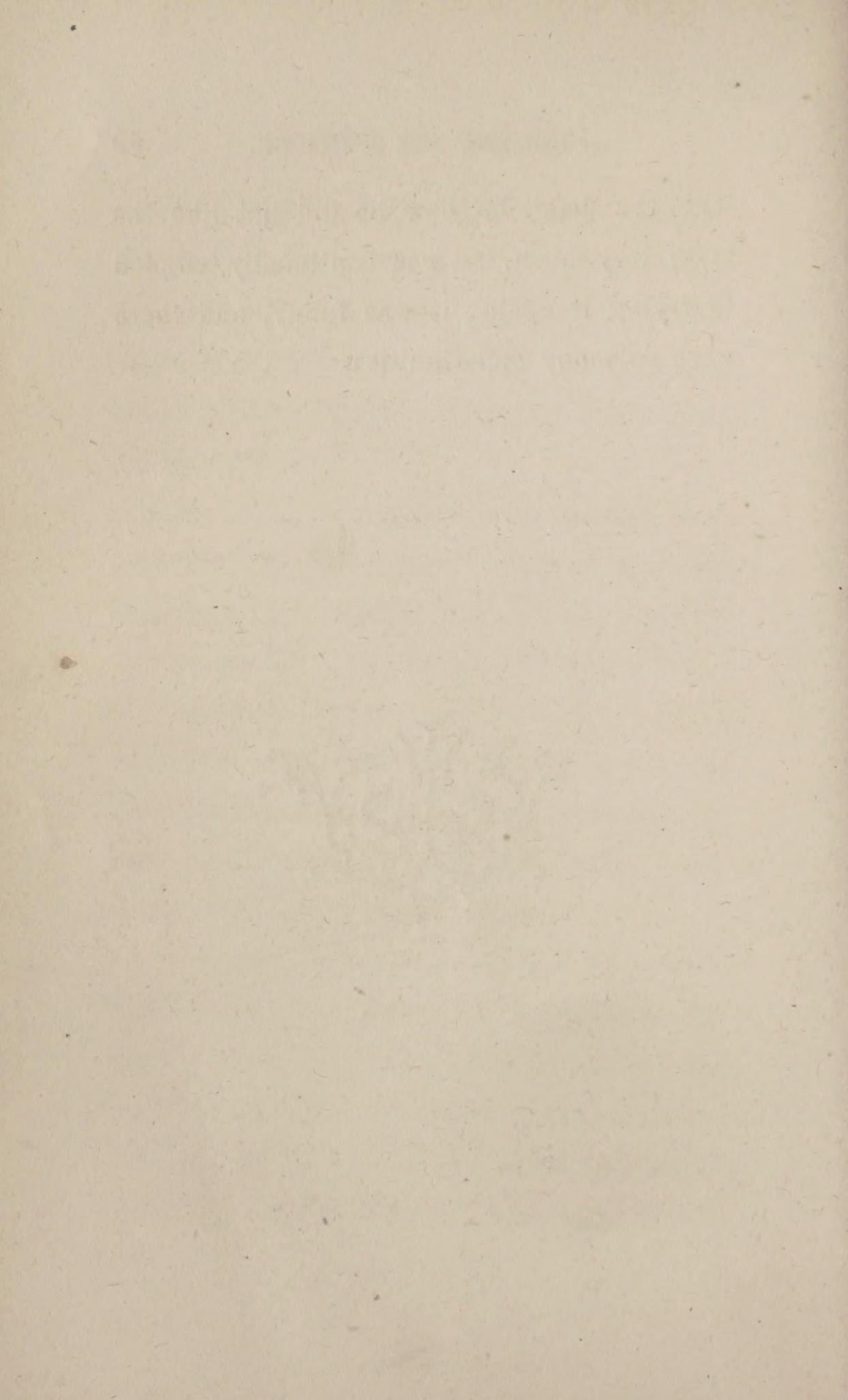
"Upon my word," said Ralph, "I did not know they were brandy-bottles. I never looked at what the clerk put up. I thought I'd treat the little chap to candy, and paid no heed to the kind. I'm sorry, Agatha, I am really; but it is not my fault."

So Agatha thought she had been a little hard on Ralph, and came down from her dignity in a tirade on liquor selling and temptations, while her father chuckled to see how she had "reckoned without her host."

So, we see from John's first acquaintance

with the demijohn, how he did not like the taste very much, but was continually tempted to trying it again ; it was funny, and there were so many opportunities.





CHAPTER II.

John not afraid of the Demijohn.





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R. STAFFORD sat comfortably reading on the piazza. Agatha stood near him pulling leaves off a climbing rose, and tearing them

in little bits. "Father," she said, "I wish

you'd give orders that no more wine or whiskey should be brought into this house."

"What now, Agatha?" said Mr. Stafford, looking over his glasses.

"Do you know how often our demijohn goes to the store?" asked Agatha.

"No," said Mr. Stafford; "the grocer's book will tell."

"It goes pretty often," said Agatha; "and there's wine and brandy besides."

"I hope the cook's honest."

"Yes: the cook is all right."

"If you mean about John, Agatha, you need not worry over him. I presume I know how to bring up a boy. The Bible tells us 'stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.' I shan't tempt him to secrecy by extra strictness. I've let him have a glass of wine on special occasions, or a taste of egg-nog or punch, that he may know the flavor and be done with it.

No one has ever seen me drink otherwise than as a gentleman. I hope you don't belong to one of these new-fangled temperance societies, Agatha."

"No, sir; but they are not new-fangled."

"They never were heard of when I was a boy," said Mr. Stafford.

"They are five hundred times older than you are," said Agatha.

"Perhaps you are better posted in their history than I am," remarked her father.

"The Nazarites were an ancient temperance society," said Agatha, laughing: "they drank neither wine nor strong drink."

"They also dispensed with a barber," suggested her father.

"The Rechabites were another temperance society, which, for many hundred years, held their by-laws intact; indeed I have heard that they exist upon the desert yet. They must, as the Lord promised to continue them to the end of time."

“One of their peculiarities is not to live in houses,” said Mr. Stafford, “which is not an example to be commended.”

“We have the record of a temperance society formed in Babylon, by Daniel and the three Hebrew children, who ‘purposed in their hearts that they would not defile themselves with the wine the king drank.’”

“*Intemperance* is older than temperance,” laughed Mr. Stafford. “Good old Noah had a drinking club of one, and kept up the bout until it laid him, metaphorically speaking, under the table.”

“And I feel convinced that after his sons, Shem and Japhet, had put him comfortably to bed, they went off and organized a temperance society,” said Agatha. She and her father had kept up their dialogue in a merry tone.

“Seriously,” said Mr. Stafford, “it would break my heart to have John a drunkard;

and I don't mean he shall be one. There's Uncle Jerry coming in ; what an old Falstaff he is ! ”

Uncle Jerry panted up to the piazza, and took the chair Agatha wheeled forward. Out of one pocket of his linen coat stuck a dark glass bottle, and from the other a little wicker-covered flask, with a silver cap screwed over the mouth.

“ There's a prime article,” observed Uncle Jerry, taking out the flask and handing it over to Mr. Stafford ; “ it is the thing to open one's eyes.”

“ Yours need something to open them wide enough to see the error of your ways,” said Agatha.

Uncle Jerry tried to open wide at his niece his small eyes which were sunken behind his fat cheeks. “ My ways were very dusty coming here to-night,” he said, trying to lift one of his elephantine feet for exhibi-

bition, but failing in the attempt. Mr. Stafford had put the flask to his lips, and now pulled it hastily away.

“Why, Uncle Jerry, that’s liquid fire! I don’t see how a mortal man can drink it! You must be tinned inside, at least, to stand such a decoction!”

“Think so?” said Uncle Jerry, complacently. “I never found the liquor that would tumble me over yet. Why, last night there were half a dozen chaps at the bar, telling how much they could stand. Says I, ‘I’ll wager I can lay you all down flat;’ and I did it, too, before twelve o’clock.”

“You ought to be ashamed to own such a scandalous performance!” cried Agatha, while John, who had come up to the step and seated himself, listened to the tale with greedy ears. Uncle Jerry put back his flask in his coat and pulled out the bottle, then took a cork-screw from his vest pocket.—

“ Try this,” he said ; “ that’s genuine Maderia, oldest kind, none of your make-believe stuff ; it’s worth its weight in gold. Can’t deceive my tongue — no, sir ! ”

“ I should have thought a man’s tongue was for saying something witty or wise,” said Agatha ; “ not for tasting liquor. How many bare feet do you suppose trod out those grapes, and how much vile trash has been used to color and flavor it ? I’ve heard that old boots, properly cut up and stirred in, give a nice hue to wine.”

“ After that speech, John,” said Uncle Jerry, “ I suppose you don’t want a tip of this nectar ? ”

“ No, he don’t,” said Mr. Stafford ; “ boys ought not to spoil their palates with liquor at all sorts of odd times.”

“ Spoil it ! Why, this will educate it — he’ll know how to tell a good article. There are men who make good livings just by being

keen enough to be tasters of teas or liquors for large dealers."

"John is not so devoid of brains that he will have to make his living by his palate," said Agatha. "Come, John, let us go down to the bridge and fish."

John ran for the lines and basket, and went off with his sister. On their way, they met their mother, who had been to make a call, and she turned about and went with them. There was a projecting beam on the bridge, that formed a comfortable seat for Mrs. Stafford, and she untied her bonnet-strings and gathered her lace shawl about her, watching the young people at their sport.

Agatha tied the ribbons of her wide flat together, and hung it on her arm. She looked very beautiful in her graceful muslin dress, bending over the low side of the bridge, and watching her line as it floated

off in the water. John, in his buff suit, sailor's hat, with fishing basket slung over his shoulder, stood near his sister, the golden light of the lingering sunset falling over them, as good omen for their glad and undivided lives. They scarcely noticed when the crimson and orange of the truant day had died beyond the hills ; for the full moonlight was about them in unclouded brightness, and their glad young voices chimed merrily to the music that ever fills a summer night. It was one of those peaceful scenes that fix themselves in memory, like fine old pictures, growing soft and mellow by time, and seen perchance full often in the growing future, through a mist of wistful tears. Under the moonlight the fishers came home.

Agatha, as her brother's joyous companion, had thrown off a care that oppressed her. She had gone to the rose-drapered porch, in the sweetness of the early evening,

to whisper her father of her fears ; but her heart had proved a traitor, and warnings had died in idle jests. Now, the whispers of coming ill filled her heart, and she could not sleep. The night grew late. The wind soughed about the house and garden, drearily. A storm was brooding. Agatha opened her windows and looked out. The bleakness of midnight slumbered on river and on sea. From the not distant coast she heard the low boom of the waves. Her mind travelled through the house. She could see John, in his sound, innocent slumbers ; her father, getting gray-haired, now sleeping, undreaming of evil. Her heart grew a little hard as it hovered over her stepmother ; but there was the long kindness of the past to recall, and it softened her.

The next morning was dull and stormy. Agatha went through the house, as usual, to see that all was in order, and what was

needful to be done. All this was left to her now. The door of Mrs. Stafford's dressing room was open ; there stood Mrs. Stafford. A glass, with lumps of sugar in it, was before her ; she poured in some brandy, added a lump of ice, and slowly stirred it with a spoon. Looking up, she saw Agatha. "It is such a miserable day, I thought I would take something to raise my spirits," she said, apologetically.

Agatha, without answering, stood like an accusing spirit, in the doorway.

"I know you don't like it ; but I really *couldn't* do without it."

Agatha's reply was irrelevant. "Mrs. Thompson says your new bonnet, with rose-colored strings, is horridly unbecoming.

"She does !" cried Mrs. Stafford, drinking her brandy ; "pink was always my favorite color, I looked so well in it."

"You do not now," said Agatha.

Mrs. Stafford turned to the mirror, and held a knot of pink ribbon near her face.

“I believe my skin *is* getting red and rough,” she exclaimed, impatiently.

“I think it is the brandy, and such stuff, that does it; and it makes you too fleshy. You used to be my beau-ideal of beauty.” And Agatha looked at her stepmother with a tender, sorrowful pity, as one looks at a grave where the grass has grown months enough for the poignancy of grief to pass away.

“You could not expect me to retain the freshness of youth at my age,” said Mrs. Stafford.

“You might be handsomer now than ever, and you might be more cheerful — your spirits are so uneven.”

“That is just it,” said Mrs. Stafford; “I should be as blue as an indigo bag if I did not take a little brandy, now and then, to brighten me up.”

“And the egg and brandy, before breakfast?”

“I need that to strengthen me and give me an appetite.”

Agatha sighed, and turned away. John had a little room for a workshop and museum. Agatha heard him in there; but the door was fastened.

“Go away, Agatha,” cried John; “I don’t want you in here now.”

After a while he came to her for scissors, needle and thread; then he went down town, through the rain. Agatha wondered what he was about. He seemed very merry over it. A day or two after, Uncle Jerry came again. He was got up, as usual, with a flask in his coat pocket, a corkscrew in his vest pocket, and a little roll containing liquor dealer’s advertisements tucked away in his vest. One coat pocket held a parcel. John was at school. Uncle Jerry took a queer

looking object from the parcel. “Did anybody ever see this before?”

The object was a short bottle, ample in circumference; it was sewed up in linen, and to it was attached a pair of short spindle legs and splay feet, and a pair of small arms; the head and hands were neatly made of putty; the hat, coat, and neck kerchief were a good copy of Uncle Jerry’s equipments; the pockets were plenty, and from each protruded a bottle; there was a bottle in each hand, and a tiny corkscrew hanging to the watch-guard. It was evidently meant for Uncle Jerry, and to make the semblance closer it had been saturated in whiskey, and smelled strongly of that “good creature.”

“I found it hung to my door this morning,” said Uncle Jerry; “and I believe that young dog John got it up.”

“I never saw it before,” said Agatha, though she also suspected John.

Mrs. Stafford looked uneasy. She eyed her son suspiciously for several days, and seemed not to want him near her. She took her morning egg and brandy in the store-room, and not at the breakfast-table.

It was October. Agatha was pouring coffee for her father. "I really think your mother ought to see the doctor," he said; "she is getting so stout and flushed, and has so much headache. I'm afraid she is threatened with apoplexy."

Agatha made no reply.

At noon Mrs. Stafford was in bed. Her husband said, at dinner, "Agatha, I think Fanny is really quite sick. I shall send up Doctor Hathway."

"There's no need," replied Agatha.

"I shall send him up and free my mind," said Mr. Stafford. "Your mother's remedies don't seem to help her."

About three o'clock, the doctor came.

“Your father sent me to see your mother, Miss Agatha.”

“She doesn’t need anything,” said Agatha, shortly.

The doctor looked puzzled.

“Will you tell her I’m here?”

“I dare say she’s asleep,” said Agatha, sewing diligently.

“I can step in, as your father desired it,” said the doctor.

“I don’t think you’d better.”

The doctor looked annoyed and perplexed. Then he quietly left the room and went upstairs. Agatha heard him knock at her mother’s door, then open it.

She leaned her head on the table and cried childishly, sobs shaking her frame. After a while, the old doctor came down. He stood beside her, gently smoothing her brown hair in a fatherly, sympathizing way. All at once, by a strong effort, Agatha

checked her emotion; she straightened herself haughtily, brushed back the hair from her reddened forehead, and dashed the tears from her eyes.

“I went up to see your mother,” said the doctor, looking at the carpet, and becoming embarrassed.

“And you found her drunk!” cried Agatha, fiercely.

“I’m sorry to say,” began the doctor.

Agatha darted from her chair, went to the window, and stood with her back to the physician.

“I am your father’s old friend. I have known your mother since she first came here. Miss Agatha, had I not better step round here to-morrow, and have a plain talk with your mother?”

Agatha answered never a word; she was too much overcome with mortification.

Mrs. Stafford had a cup of tea in her

room. Next day, she was sitting on the piazza, about ten o'clock, making a pretence of sewing, when Doctor Hathway's carriage stopped at the gate, and the good man took a chair by her side. He talked some time, in a low, grave tone. Agatha, sitting in the parlor, arranging a case of shells, heard him, and her cheeks burned, and her heart ached.

When the doctor was gone, Mrs. Stafford sat a long while with her handkerchief pressed to her eyes. Then Agatha heard her go through the hall, and into the store-room; there followed a dripping sound for a moment; then she went up-stairs, and Agatha, with a groan, went to shut the store-room door. Just as she expected, she found the dark rim of the demijohn wet, and the cork lying on the floor.

In a few weeks Mrs. Stafford was ill again.

“I spoke to Hathway about stepping round,

and he said, queerly too, he did not think he could do my wife any good," said Mr. Stafford to his daughter.

"I don't think he can," said Agatha, fearing to say more.

Cold December—the winds tossed the snow into low mounds—graves where the summer's beauty lay dead and buried. Agatha felt as if all her pride, her buoyancy, her hope, lay dead and buried with the summer flowers. She did not like to go out; people whispered things about her mother which she was not meant to hear; there was the finger of scorn pointed at the Stafford family, she thought, and a cruel shame dwelt among them. She dreaded to have John go among his mates, and trembled, when he came rushing home, lest he should pour into her ear indignant accusations.

It was coming Christmas. Agatha had made her mince pies, and her fruit cakes,

had selected the fattest turkey from the strutting flock, and the whitest celery from its bleaching trench. She was busy on gifts for John.

Her father had eaten but little dinner; had gone up-stairs and come down a time or two. He stood before her, resting his elbow on the mantel. Trouble lowered on his brow; he could not meet his daughter's eye. As for Agatha, she avoided looking at him.

“Agatha,” he faltered, “do you know what is the matter with your mother?”

Agatha worked away without answering.

“I believe she is intoxicated.”

“Yes,” said Agatha.

He tramped up and down the room muttering.

“She has no fault but one,” said Agatha; “think how lovely she used to be—”

“I believe Doctor Hathway knows it,” roared her father.

“Perhaps if you charged her to touch no more liquor in any shape, this might all be done away.”

“I believe everybody knows it,” shouted Mr. Stafford.

“If she would promise you to abstain, all would be right.”

“What an example for her son!” cried the indignant man. “I’m ashamed to meet the boy’s eye.”

“He does not know it,” said Agatha. “Not yet.”

That was a dreary winter; how often during those dark days did Agatha argue with her stepmother over her infatuation; or use to her the tenderest entreaties. The girl was steadfast in her affections: the love that Mrs. Stafford had won years before was faithful now. Agatha could not despise or reject the erring one; but weeping over her failings, and striving to hide her disgrace, mak-

ing up for her domestic and social short-comings, Agatha stood between her stepmother and a condemning world.

The history of Mrs. Stafford's downfall may be strange; but, alas, is far from unparalleled. For some fourteen years she had used liquors upon her table to add piquancy or flavor to almost every meal; they had been the remedies of all her ailments, and by degrees the fatal appetite had grown upon her until reason, honor, and decent shame were paralyzed, and she had become that most hideous object,—a drunken woman.

One of the worst features in her case was that she could not be brought to see her errors. She asserted that she did not use liquors to excess; she only took what was absolutely necessary to her physical well-being; she denied ever being overcome by the stimulant; her heaviness, her stupor, her pains were offsprings of some other cause; to the

illnesses whiskey had created, whiskey was made to administer; and in her own room, hiding from the anguished reproaches of husband and daughter, the self-destroyer mixed and drank her daily poison.

Though never intoxicated outside of her own house, and indeed going out but little into a neighborhood that was now looking coldly upon her, the history of Mrs. Stafford's failings crept abroad; the scandal was on every tongue. Knowing this, Agatha was prepared for the public mortifications that must surely follow.

It was on an April morning that, as she was tending a row of hyacinth glasses set in the soft spring sunshine, she saw entering the gate the pastor and officers of their church. She knew their errand; she hastened up-stairs.

“Sara, open the door for those gentlemen, and call my mother.”

Then she went to her room, in an agony; but as the visit down stairs was prolonged, she could not remain quiet. Nick, no longer hired boy, but hired man, was busy at some borders on the side of the house; she went down to give instructions concerning her favorite flowers. Still the guests lingered. They were striving hard, with prayer and counsel, to bring the erring woman to a better mind. Tears ran down the pastor's cheeks as she obstinately denied all fault, and advocated her right to do as she pleased, and as was "needful for her health."

Agatha saw her father approaching the garden; she did not wish him to enter unsuspecting upon the conference in the parlor. She hastened to warn him; his feet were on the porch steps; there was a bustle in the hall, the discussion had ended; the door opened, the most reputable men of the

town were facing Mr. Stafford in his doorway, and what had been their errand ! His head drooped. Agatha put her hand through her father's arm, and, with flushing cheeks and form erect, stood before the visitors ; the old man should not bear his shame alone. What kind hearts then ached over that father and daughter !

John knew that there was some dark cloud over the household ; but what it was he could not tell. His father and sister carefully concealed from him his mother's weakness ; no one outside was cruel enough to tell him of that drunken mother. People remembered too well the brightness and pleasantness of Mrs. Stafford's early days, her hospitality, her charities, her friendly, neighborly ways, to triumph over her now. They missed her in the town ; every one felt their loss in that kindly woman's lamentable wreck ; and even boys, apt to be so bitter

and so hard, caught the general tone, and uttered no taunt to the comrade whose lot was much more hard than theirs.

Again it was June, and the winds were drifting showers of almond petals to the bay window. Agatha sat there, as of yore; she was older than in those days when her young dreams had fallen into rhymes that chimed with the summer sunshine and the summer flowers. Sorrow, rather than the fleeting years, had touched her; yet, like goodly fruits, which mellow and mature under suns and storms, Agatha's girlhood's promise had ripened into a gracious womanhood.

Some one stood on the walk, close to the window, talking to her. It was not John, with feathered cap and borrowed cane, satchel on shoulder. John had gone off to school. It was Ralph Curtis; he had waited long to speak his mind to Agatha, and now would

wait no longer. Agatha had been cutting flowers for the mantel vases, and had them in her lap — white lilies folded into long, perfumed buds, and cypress and juniper with their sombre green.

Agatha was speaking. “It is idle to hush over this trouble, Ralph; you know what misery has come to us. My father and John need my love and care; I cannot desert them.”

“It is not,” said Ralph, “that you should love them less, but me more.”

Agatha laid a cluster of lilies on a branch of juniper, and twisted the white buds in and out among the green. She had made up her mind; she looked steadily at Ralph.

“Trouble from liquor, Ralph, seems to be the heir-loom of our house. You know the history of my Uncle Archie, my grandmother, and my aunt; you know that in our part of the cemetery very bitter ills lie buried,

and that one just as bitter is living among us now. I will never put my happiness in the keeping of one who is not thoroughly a temperance man. The example of the past shall suffice at least *one* generation."

Ralph crimsoned. "I'm sorry you think so poorly of me, Agatha ; you know very well that liquor has never yet got the upper hands of me, and I only take it in moderation, and as a gentleman. Do you think me a sot ? However, I *can* go over to the fanatics and sign the pledge, if that will please you ; and you want me to sign away my liberty for you," he added, pettishly.

"No," said Agatha, "I do not tell you to sign away your liberty for *me*, because I am not willing to make a return in kind to you. I am safest guiding my life myself ; so let it be."

"I don't believe you know how to care for anybody!" cried Ralph.

“I know how to care for myself,” replied Agatha, calmly. “I am strong,—strong enough for myself, and for my father, and John, when they need to lean on me for comfort. I can see the future full enough of cares that are not of my bringing; I will not risk burdening it with any more.”

“I don’t think I should bring you extra care,” said Ralph.

“You have known for a good many years,” said Agatha, “that I abominate liquors in every form; yet you always take them at parties, at your club, and even go into saloons with your friends. This may now be a cloud no bigger than a man’s hand; yet, if I cared for you, it might grow into a storm that would deluge my life with tears.”

“You are not willing, then,” said Ralph, “to make any sacrifice for those you love?”

“There is no wisdom,” replied Agatha, “in loving just for the sake of making sac-

rifices. My mind is made up, Ralph ; I have chosen a lot with father and with John."

Agatha had finished her bouquets. Her lilies, lying in juniper and cypress, were typing the sweetness of life set in its bitter cares ; and clustered under these were violets, and the first opening rose-buds, — the good deeds that fringe the commonest life with beauty.

That night, Agatha, for the first time, had to call Sara to help her get her mother to bed. Mrs. Stafford's form had grown coarse and large. She lay heavily back in her chair, while her daughter and the maid took off her day clothing. Agatha set her lips firmly together, and forced herself to finish her task with steady hands and dry eyes. Sara, long a servant in the house, cried freely. Left alone with the deep breathing sleeper, Agatha turned down the lamp, smoothed the bed clothes, set the room in order ; then she

stood a moment by the foot of the bed. "There is one comfort," she said to herself: "I shall never have to go through these miseries and mortifications for a drunken husband." Then she went to her own room. She had a habit of walking up and down with her arms folded behind her. There was a balcony before her room, and the window opened on it to the floor; she went out, and slowly paced its length again and again in the clear June starlight. She had said she was strong: was she strong enough to walk unhelped the rough places of this world? Her father was growing old and broken; John might fall as his mother had fallen; the pleasant friend of her youth was hopelessly degraded, lying in a drunkard's sleep, mother only in name. Agatha knew that she was not sufficient for these things: she yearned for something higher and better; she longed for a comforter and counsellor

that could never fail, never know weakness ; she remembered how in the world's first history Enoch had walked with God. Such a walk must be hers if she would run and not be weary, walk and not faint. She had chosen, like a good woman of old, to dwell among her own people, to abide by the fortunes of her earliest home ; but there God would be, if she called upon him. He had promised to dwell with his servants, and be their God. Then and there, helped from on high, did Agatha Stafford set her feet in the narrow way ; a life of conflict was lying unseen before her, the din of battle had yet scarce begun, and the good All-father, seeing the end from the beginning, taught her to start right, girded with armor of proof, the whole armor of God ; and much did she need it in all the darkening days. In such a life as hers, without this heavenly grace, her heart would have turned to dead ashes,

the sweetness of her being changed to gall, and, instead of looking out on the world with kind and pitying eyes, she would have grown a harsh misanthrope at cross purposes with all her race.

Agatha's was an earnest nature. When she chose God for her portion, gave herself to him, she did it unreservedly, with intensity of purpose: henceforth she was not to live unto herself; and being before her grew deeper and broader, so it took hold on the fulness of eternity.

With this self-dedication came a little gleam of hope. The religion that could be so much to her, must be something to her mother, who had so long professed it,—by that she could form to her some new appeals; then she remembered how the pastor and the officers of the church had not failed in faithfulness, and had come to reason with their wanderer, more than once or twice.

However, she knew she could pray, and she hoped much from prayer. Well she might; and yet prayer does not always check the heedless persistent feet whose steps take hold on death.

Before long occurred what, with intense mortification, Mr. Stafford and Agatha had expected. Mrs. Stafford was publicly cut off from communion with the church, until such time as by repentance, confession, and amendment, she might be fit to be restored. That was a sad day: the act was judged necessary to prevent a public stain on religion, and to preserve the purity of that body, whose holy Head is Christ. All mourned over one so far astray as not to recognize her own disgrace, or give even remote hope of a good return; and all sympathy went out to a man who had for sixty years held unblemished reputation and good position before the community; and for

daughter and son, who loved and cherished the evil-doer, and blushed where she would not blush for herself.

“Father,” said Agatha, “this thing is becoming too notorious. John will know all about it soon. It may make him reckless. At least he is so high-spirited, that I am afraid it will break his heart. Hadn’t you better send him away to school?”

Mr. Stafford thought this a good suggestion ; but to send away John, in whose lively, ardent spirit he now alone had refuge from the weight of his griefs, was like bereaving old Jacob of his Benjamin. He could cry with the patriarch, “If I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.” He did not know then that Ralph Curtis had formally endeavored to take away Agatha.

Agatha had wished she had a wise mother to talk to about the course she had taken, but she had not been educated to find a

confidant in her father. Uncle Jerry, who knew more of gossip than any old woman, informed Mr. Stafford that Agatha "had thrown Ralph Curtis overboard."

Mr. Stafford hinted this remark to his daughter.

"Father," said Agatha, "don't you know anybody that needs me more than Ralph Curtis does?"

"I *do* need you," said her father. Then after a time, "If that is your *only* reason, Agatha, I don't want you to sacrifice yourself to me."

"It is not my only reason," said Agatha. "I feel that I have not courage enough to endure such fires as *you* are now walking in. Nor do I wish to look forward to growing elderly, and sitting day after day opposite such another figure as Uncle Jerry."

"I did not think Ralph in *that* danger," said Mr. Stafford.

“There’s safety in ‘Total Abstinence,’ ” said Agatha.

“I have not advocated that doctrine, and you see where I am,” said Mr. Stafford.

“You may be the rule or its exception,” said Agatha; “but would you advise me to run the risk?”

“No,—I would not,” said Mr. Stafford, slowly.

John was sent away to school. Agatha prepared his outfit, between pride, regret, and anxiety. While the mother was unable to counsel, she endeavored to supply her place.

“John,” said Agatha, laying her hand on the boy’s shoulder, and gazing earnestly into his eyes, “I look to you for most of the happiness of my life.”

Alas, Agatha! if you had said “most of the misery,” you would have come nearer the mark.

Three months, five months gone by,—the

home-burden was very heavy ; but from John's school came good reports : he was a bright boy, a studious boy, a popular boy ; and daily more and more of golden hopes clustered about this boy's future.

John was coming home for vacation. Agatha, knowing well his tastes, was planning expeditions after birds, flowers, insects, and minerals ; and had gathered into his room new books, new tools, new fishing tackle, and new shot-gun and accoutrements.

She was coming homeward from the post-office one morning, and a boy and a girl of about fourteen walked just before her. The boy was speaking : " Is that so ? I guess it runs in the blood. Why, John Stafford can toss off a glass just as easy."

" Shocking ! " cried the girl.

" Of course it is not often he does it, nor does it make him drunk ; but I've seen him do it. He said he could, and he did."

“ I shouldn’t think the school would allow it.”

“ Pooh ! boys don’t always mind the rules ! ”

“ Why, he’ll be a drunkard next ! ” cried the girl.

“ So some of the boys told him ; but he hooted at them. He said he didn’t care for the taste, and it did not hurt him any, and he never meant to drink it much ; but he wasn’t such a coward as to be afraid of a little whiskey. He was strong enough to act like a man, and not disgrace himself. He just did it to show he was not afraid.”

Agatha went home in agony ; the iron had entered her soul. Her brother, her noble, darling boy, the centre of her proudest hopes, was going the drunkard’s way. Trembling, she told her father.

“ He’s too young to go away from home,” he said : “ we must bring him back and see

to him. But how can we bring him where his mother is going on so ? ” and he groaned aloud.

“ There is but one way. Let mother be sent to the Inebriate Asylum,” said Agatha.

“ How can I take my wife to such a place ? I could not look a man in the face while I made the shame public.”

“ It is public now,” said Agatha ; “ but you know, father, I can do anything. I will take her there, and you go stay with John, until examination is over. When you bring him home, all will be ready.”

Mr. Stafford told his son that “ his poor mother had been taken to an asylum.” John wept ; he thought his mother was insane ; he did not fully know of her evil habit, and concluded her mind was astray.

John’s mind was now also a little astray : he was not afraid of the Demijohn.

CHAPTER III.

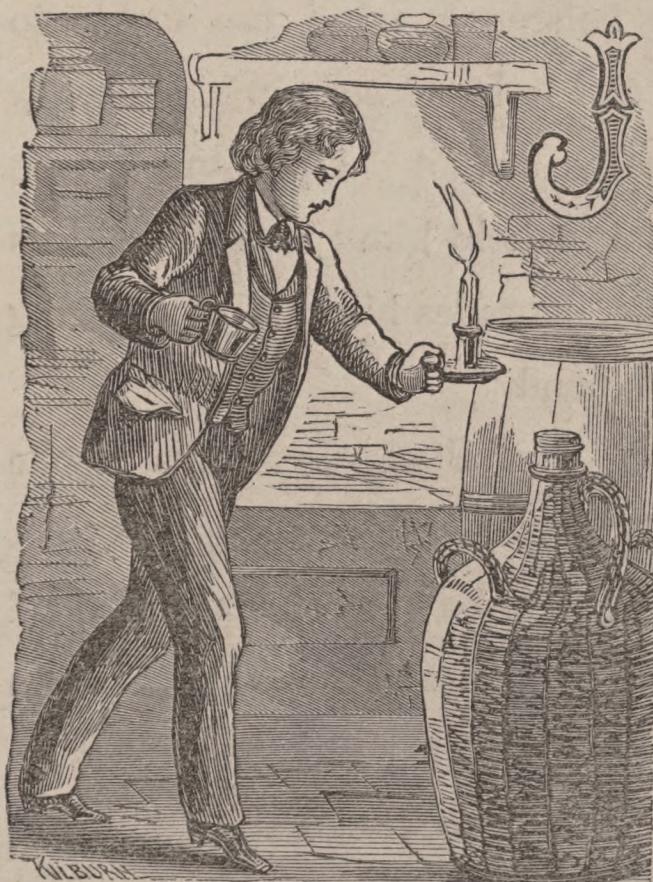
John begins to like the Demijohn.





CHAPTER III.

John begins to like the Demijohn.



JOHN was the central object of love and care to his father and Agatha. Two thoughts about him now perplexed them; any liking he

had for liquor must be eradicated, and he

must be prepared for college. For his son's sake Mr. Stafford banished wine from his dinner-table, and Agatha had long rejected it from the cooking. The question started by Agatha was, "Shall John take the pledge?"

"No," said Mr. Stafford. "A pledge presupposes a contemptible weakness. It is only used to bolster a mind too feeble to stand alone; and it is, of course, insufficient. If a man really cannot help himself, the pledge will not uphold him; and if he does not need it, he degrades himself by entering into any such bond."

Before John, Mr. Stafford always spoke sneeringly of temperance societies, saying, "every man ought to be able to stand alone." He was, however, very anxious that his son should have no craving for strong drink.

"Wine, John, clouds the brain," he said.

"Think so, father?" he replied. "I read

an article in a magazine,—first-rate article too,—saying that a man's mind was more active after a breakfast of bread and wine than after taking any other nourishment. I tried it when we were cramming for review, and I could study like a streak of lightning."

"I wouldn't have done it," said his father
"Any study under unnatural pressure must be bad for the health."

"I didn't care for the health," said John.
"I was bound not to let those other fellows get ahead of me."

"A man, John," remarked Mr. Stafford again, "loses more than he makes, by liking liquor. There's Ralph Curtis has lost your sister by that very thing."

"Agatha's over-particular," quoth John.
"I hope, John, you have not been indulging in whiskey at school."

"Only when it was necessary," replied John.

“And how frequently was it necessary?” asked his father anxiously: he had heard this plea before.

“Why, once in a while, when we were getting up a declamation, or putting in two or three extra hours’ study at night, we’d have a glass of hot toddy, not very strong, of course, and it opened our eyes, and stirred us up jolly.”

“No more such doings,” said Mr. Stafford sternly. “Do you want to grow such a specimen as Uncle Jerry?”

John did not look much like such a transformation then, as, in his bright, happy boyhood, he was with his sister, roaming through fields and woods, fishing, riding, shooting, enjoying himself generally. He said “Agatha was better company than half the boys in town.” Yet he liked these other boys, and many were the picnics and boating-parties Agatha helped him to organize. He was studying at the Academy, and had a

tutor an hour a day besides, and his progress was steady and rapid.

While Mr. Stafford was lopping off the top and outmost boughs of the tree, Intemperance, Agatha was striking at the root. She believed that nothing but the grace of God would keep her brother from the fatal snare: for that grace she prayed.

Temperance, as an organization, has done much for religion, in fixing in the church a better idea on the subject of intoxicating drinks. In return, where temperance comes short of its aim, and cannot steady the tempted soul, religion, the power from on high, shall aid the cause of temperance, by descending on the faltering heart, and filling it with righteousness, and setting it in the clear sunlight of God's love. Thus may Religion and Temperance, fair sisters, walk hand in hand until the hosts of God, pouring triumphant from the millennial gates, shall crown them abundant conquerors.

John would listen quietly while his sister talked to him of the service of the Lord ; but his heart was far from the new life she pointed out. His ambition was to be a doctor, a surgeon ; to rise to the head of his profession ; to write books that should rank as high authority, and should make him famous. He had no goal but this ; he saw such destiny clearly before him ; he had no other thought than to conquer for himself such future ; it was only a question of time. There stood John on the threshold of life, girding himself valiantly for the race. There far away was the shining prize of honor and emolument ; he was on the straight road thither ; he was ready to run like a young athlete ; but ah, me ! there lay a lion crouching in the way ! One thrust from the sword of the Spirit would lay that monster low ; but the sword of the Spirit was not of John's preparations for the running.

He would sometimes go with Agatha to

lecture or prayer-meeting; sometimes he would prefer to stay at home and study. Staying home so one evening, when father and sister were both at church, John suddenly thought he would make a little sling, to cheer his progress over his chemistry. He had had nothing of this kind since he came home; he craved it somewhat, for, truth to say, John began to have a liking for the contents of the demijohn.

He took a small lamp in one hand, a tin cup in the other, and went to the store-room; he went slowly and guiltily like a thief; he was ashamed of his intention; he had no pain or feebleness to plead as his excuse; his task was neither long nor hard; his head was clear; he was going for whiskey just because he wanted it,—wanted it for its own sake. No wonder John blushed, and trod on tiptoe.

“ Pshaw ! can’t a fellow do as he likes ? ”

said John, angrily to himself. “One need not be an old fogy!”

He poured out a portion from the demijohn in haste, setting down his lamp and holding the cork between his teeth; the cork had the old-time flavor. John half-filled his cup, and hurried to his room. He had water there, and took a big lump of sugar from the bowl in the china-closet, as he went along. He was up to school-boy tricks, and meant to heat his potion over the lamp in his room. Safe in that pleasant room, John got his lamp ready, and thought he would just take a taste of the raw “article” before adding sugar or water. His eyes opened wide over the gulp he took: it was clear water, and nothing more. He pondered: he certainly had half-filled his cup from the demijohn that for years had held its appropriate supply; and now, instead of fiery “Bourbon” or good old “Apple” whiskey, here was—water.

“That’s some of Agatha’s work,” said John. “I never saw such a girl!”

John did not like to question his sister on the subject of the demijohn; yet it weighed on his mind, and he ventured to say, one morning,

“What ever made you empty out that whiskey?”

“I didn’t want the mischievous stuff about.”

“I ought to quote you the verse Uncle Jerry is always getting about half off, and never finishes. I’ve interrupted him fifty times in the middle of it. ‘Every creature of God is good and not to be—’”

“I found a better creature to put in the demijohn.”

“But what is a fellow to do when he’s got a specimen of a bug, or a reptile, or the like, to put up in spirits for preservation?”

Put them in the bottles, and go down to

the drug-store and have them filled with alcohol," said Agatha.

Uncle Jerry had got past the point where he could say "whiskey did not affect him." Whiskey was bringing foul disgrace on his gray hairs: he would get stupidly drunk, and go staggering about, not knowing what he was doing. Agatha and her father were out together one evening, and, when they came in, they found Uncle Jerry lying on the lounge in the sitting-room, his face purple, his mouth open, and his loud snores filling the room.

"What does all this mean?" demanded Agatha.

John, who was lying back in the rocking-chair as if exhausted, burst into a peal of laughter. At last he explained: "I was sitting here reading, when I heard a stumbling and scratching on the porch, as if two or three dogs were out there. I heard mumbling

and muttering, too; and I knew it was something human. Then I heard, 'Every creature is good;' and I knew it was Uncle Jerry. I took a lamp, and opened the door. There was Uncle Jerry below the steps, clawing about, and tugging at the scraper like mad. He saw my light, and looked up too funny for anything. Says he, 'You young dog, what you got this door turned up-side down for, and this handle tied so tight it won't turn? Come down out of that window and help your old uncle!' I set my lamp on a chair, and went out and began handling him by his coat-collar. How he howled, 'Hands off! Is a man of my weight a fly, that he can crawl up the side of the house?' I towed him on, and he struggled, yelling, 'Let me open the door. I ain't a thief to get in at the window!' and I pulled like a good one, and finally had him in the room, and pushed him on the lounge. Says he,

‘There ! that’s the first time I ever clomb the side of the house. What’ll Agg say to that ?’ I’ve laughed until I am nearly dead !”

Mr. Stafford laughed too.

Agatha was indignant. “I will not have him coming here in this condition,” she cried: “we have had trouble and disgrace enough. You must teach him better, father. He has no claim on us.”

“We can’t get rid of him to-night,” said John: “he can’t walk a rod. What an old spectacle it is, a *man* lying like a *hog*. Bah !”

“Call Nick to get him up-stairs ; and to-morrow I will let him know this is not to be repeated,” said Mr. Stafford.

While Nick was coming, John began to ‘stir up’ his uncle. Finding his efforts fail, he coolly upset a glass of water over his face, while Agatha cried, “Take care that lounge !” and his father, “Have done that, sir !”

Roused by the sudden chill, Uncle Jerry straightened himself up, reaching aimlessly about. "Ah, Agg, how do? Say now, ain't every creature good, and not to be despised?"

Here, Nick the strong brought him to his feet, and began to take him up-stairs.

"This must never happen again," said Agatha: "nothing is so hateful to me as a drunken person."

Poor Agatha! she was doomed to be often disgusted.

"See," said Mr. Stafford, beginning to moralize, "to what a contemptible object a man may be reduced, who uses intoxicating liquors."

"To excess," added John.

"To excess," admitted his father.

"And to that excess most who use them at all, are liable," thus Agatha.

"That's putting it too strong," said John.

“Uncle Jerry is not a fair specimen. He never had any intellectual tastes: he *loved* whiskey, and loved nothing else.”

While Agatha felt profound pity and mortification at seeing any human being reduced to the vile condition of Uncle Jerry, John thought his relative’s vagaries wonderfully funny. He came home from a debating club one night, and, sitting by his sister, began to laugh.

“What is the matter?” asked Agatha.

“I’ve had another adventure with Uncle Jerry.”

“I don’t want to hear about it.”

“Yes: you do; it is the best joke. As I came home, Uncle Jerry was rolling along, half a square ahead of me; and between us was a weazened-up little man, drunk also. Uncle Jerry was roaring out bits of songs — his favorite quotation — prices of liquors, and eulogies on his favorite drinks, making as

much noise as fifty lions. He wound up every half-sentence with a howl. That howl seemed to raise the dormant ambition of the little man, and he would begin to peep and mutter, about as loud as a half-grown chick. Uncle Jerry would catch the sound, and below at him, 'Hush up; don't disturb the streets at night. Keep quiet; come on easy like I do. Hold your tongue; you'll frighten the folks; ' and close up his exhortations with a whoop like a thousand owls."

Agatha looked very grave.

"Why don't you laugh, Agg?" said John, poking his finger at her.

"I can't," said Agatha. "Oh, John, suppose I should ever see you, grand boy that you are now, reduced so low!"

She stood before him, her hands on his shoulders, looking into his eyes.

"Will you desert me if I come to that?" asked John, lightly.

“I shall always stand by you,” said Agatha, sadly.

“Never fear,” cried John: “you shall see me the top and crowning glory of my profession; the pride of your heart, the honor of our family name; and, if you live so long, you shall see me hale and wise, the patriarch of some city, a notable old man.”

“The secret of a hale old age,” replied Agatha, “is touched by Shakespeare’s Adam, when he says to young Orlando,—

“Though I look old, yet am I strong and lusty:
For in my youth I never did apply
Hot and rebellious liquors to my blood.”

When we said that Mr. Stafford had banished wine from his dinner table, and in relating that Agatha had filled the ancient demijohn with water, we did not mean to suggest that liquors were driven from the house entirely. Mr. Stafford would have thought this the height of absurdity. He

must have such things on hand, for illness, or to treat a guest ; and, while the storeroom, where Agatha held supreme sway, was emptied of the poison, down in the cellar were cases of bottles packed in sawdust,—bottles with black, dusty, cobwebby necks, of whose contents our John was not at all afraid.

He brought one bottle up, and disposed of it by degrees, as he sat studying in his room. A small taste was enough for him at one time ; but that small taste he liked, and sometimes craved. Yet he dared not let his father or Agatha know this secret ; he was ashamed of it, and, moreover, was sure of strong censures.

Before Christmas, he had used the second bottle. Had John kept utter silence on the subject of this growing appetite, he might not just then have heard bad news ; but he was apt to brag a little, before boys, of his knowledge of wine, thinking it looked manly

to have a preference for this or that; and he liked to talk of “prime articles,” and our “last case of sherry,” and of the virtues of certain champagne, just for the sake of hearing himself, and of being thought a dashing lad. But these remarks caused others new to his ears: hints about his “not knowing how things stood;” “wouldn’t talk so loud if he did;” “might come to grief, yet;” and reference, all dark and not apprehended, to his “mother.”

These dark sayings he was resolved Agatha must unravel. He went home from the Academy one afternoon, intent on “coming at the bottom of matters.”

That had been a bad day for Agatha. A letter from the Asylum physician had given small hope of ever effecting a cure in Mrs. Stafford’s case. Her father had grown very melancholy, and had thought a glass of wine would do him good; and, going down cellar

for a bottle, had found two gone. He had laid this first to the cook, and then to Nick ; but Agatha, with a clearer insight, had discerned the real culprit, and made good her suspicions by bringing the empty bottles from remote corners of John's closet.

Mr. Stafford had gone down town moody ; and Agatha had been weeping, and, when John came home, sat dressed for the afternoon, sewing, with a dismal face.

" Agatha," said John, " when did you hear from mother ? "

" To-day : she is no better."

" Honor bright, where is mother ? "

" At an asylum. John, you've taken two bottles of wine from the cellar."

John started and flushed. " What of that ? " he snapped. " That's nothing."

" It is a great deal," said his sister.

" I have a right to a share of what's in the house. It is no worse than taking a slice of cake. Can't I do that ? "

Take the cake ? Yes : all you want. John, this liking wine and such stuff is a terrible matter : you're on the road to ruin."

"That's a pretty way to tackle a fellow," said John, kicking his heel into the carpet.

"I've seen those, as far from expecting danger as you are, completely destroyed," began Agatha.

"Quit that!" cried John. "I didn't come here to get a temperance lecture. What do all these hints I get flung at me mean ? Tell me now, true as preaching, what is this about my mother ?"

"Your mother is in an Inebriate Asylum," said Agatha, desperately.

John blanched. "*My mother* a drunkard ?"

"Yes," groaned Agatha, hiding her face.

John flung up his arms wildly over his head, gave a cry, turned as if to fly somewhere, and fell senseless at his sister's feet.

Agatha had underrated her brother's ex-

treme sensitiveness. The blow that had been so terrible to her, when the knowledge of it came slowly through months and even years, had fallen on John with the suddenness of a thunder-bolt: besides, there was a tie between John and his mother, such as did not bind Agatha to Mrs. Stafford; the strong tie of nature was tenderer than the affection that had grown up between the two once strangers.

Shocked at the effect of her words, Agatha bitterly reproached herself, as she strove first to restore consciousness, and then to administer comfort.

Her father also upbraided her. "You have broken the poor boy's heart," he said.

The bitterness of that hour never left Agatha. She felt as if she had been cruel to the brother she loved so well, as if she had blighted his happy youth, and done him irreparable injury — for which her utmost devotion must atone.

Coming to himself, John refused all sympathy ; he sat with his head on his hands, rejecting food or comfort, and, at last, went drearily to his bed. Agatha could not rest while she knew he was suffering ; she went at length to his room, and kneeling down in the darkness by his bed, threw her arms over his neck, as often she had come to hush him to sleep in his baby-years. The poor boy was crying.

“ John,” said Agatha, “ you must not feel as if mother was cast out or neglected. She is where she can have every comfort and attention. We do not think of her with anger or harshness : we consider her as if insane on that one point. We remember all her goodness, all her pleasant ways, her prettiness, the kind acts she did ; and to me, John, they were more than can ever be repaid ; and we love her still, and hope some day to have her back with us, cured.”

“ But every one will despise her, mock

her, talk of her, even if she does come back cured," said John, with a sob.

"No, no," said Agatha: "there is no one here who will not rejoice to see her; who will not look on this past as a miserable mania, and be eager to see her and encourage her. She is not despised here, John: she is pitied—"

"I don't want my mother to be pitied. I want her to be respected," said John, groaning.

"How can you live here and endure it?" he burst out suddenly. "Why don't you get away where nobody knows you?"

"God can help us to endure it, John," said Agatha. "Here is the place where he has put us, and he opens to us no way of leaving it; our duties are here. We are pained but not disgraced by this: we can only be disgraced by wrong-doing of our own."

"Go away, Agatha," said John; "it was just as well for you to tell me. I was bound to find it out somehow; and if any one had told me down town, I don't believe I should ever have got home."

Agatha kissed him, and went away.

Early next morning, John went to Nick.

"Nick, here's my desk-key; go to desk No. 16, and bring me all that's in it."

So John's books were piled upon the hall-table. After breakfast, he sat down, drearily, in a corner of the dining-room.

"Schooltime, my son," said Mr. Stafford, hesitatingly.

"I'm not going to school," said John. "Do you suppose I can face those boys after this?"

"You've done a bad piece of business for us, Agatha," said Mr. Stafford, looking at Agatha, who was washing silver, by the breakfast-table.

“No: she hasn’t,” interrupted John. “What would I have done if I had heard *that* in a room full of boys? I’d have gone and pitched myself into the river.”

Still at noon was John to be found hiding in the house, and Agatha a picture of misery, watching him.

“John,” said Mr. Stafford, “I hope you are not going to let yourself be wrecked over your mother’s failings. You are all the hope I have; you must hold up your head, and be a man. I want to have some comfort of you before I drop into my grave; and, as your sister has evidently made up her mind to stick by you, I want to feel that you are going to be a good protector for her.”

“And,” said John, sharply, “the more of a man I am, the more I get to be known, the more people there will be to say, ‘His mother was a drunkard.’ I think the best

we three can do, is to hide ourselves in some hole where we'll never be heard of again."

"John," said Mr. Stafford, wiping his eyes, "there are very few things that, by noble deeds and purposes, we cannot live down."

Of course, the excess of John's feelings, in due time, wore off. However, he would not go into the town, nor would he go to the Academy ; he loved study and he studied at home. His tutor came each morning, and in the afternoons he would shoulder his gun and go off for a tramp in the woods. It was a lonely, misanthropic life for a boy, and Agatha hoped it would soon glide into something brighter.

As it was winter, she could not go out in the woods with him as she had once done ; but one afternoon, in spite of the cold, she proposed a walk to the coast ; she could not bear to see the boy with such a gloomy

face, taking to the dark, snowy woods ; and the anxiety until he came home at nightfall, was more than she was willing to endure.

It was two miles to the sea-shore ; but Agatha was a swift and tireless walker, and she strove to lighten the way by lively or earnest conversation, and at last the sea, blue and glittering in the winter sunshine, was tossing its, cold, white-capped waves at their feet. The beach was hard, shining sand ; farther away, the bare cliffs frowned over the sea. The wind was strong and cutting. Agatha drew her fur coat closely about her, and, putting her hand through John's arm, stood braving the gale.

So hereafter was she to stand with him, braving the tempests of a life, whose golden summer, even now passing away, was pressed close by a long and stormy winter.

Coming home, they met Uncle Jerry, a jug in his hand.

“Good-day, folks!” he cried. “Cold day! Step in here to my room, and I’ll give you a stiff tip that will keep you on your feet, in spite of the wind.”

“I don’t want any,” said John, sulkily.

“Oh, come now, come now. You ain’t setting up, like Agg, to despise the good things of this life. If you’d receive ‘em with thanksgiving, like I do, Agg, they wouldn’t do you a mite of hurt. Come in.”

The brother and sister passed by him. “Agatha,” asked John, thickly, did — mother ever — act like that?”

“Oh, no, indeed!” said Agatha, “if anything was — wrong, she staid quietly in her own room, and nobody saw her, unless I did, or Sara.”

John drew a long breath. “Then she was never about the streets?”

“Oh, no, John. Poor boy! have you been thinking of such things?”

Spring came.

“Father,” said John, “there’s no use of talking, I am not going to school here any more. But I’ll go to —— Academy, and I’ll be ready to enter college at commencement.”

“I suppose you’ll have to do so,” said Mr. Stafford. He thought of the news that had come home from John’s school the previous year. So did Agatha; but she set about getting him ready for a start. He sat down by her one day, while she was marking his handkerchiefs, not with indelible ink, but with dainty needle-work.

“John, I shall miss you,” she said; “and I shall be anxious about you. I so want you to do right, John. There is one thing that would make me very happy about you.”

John knew what she meant; but he said, “What’s that?” in a careless tone.

“If you were only a Christian, John.”

“I don’t know how to set about being that,” said John; “it is the hardest thing you could tell me.”

“Don’t you feel the need of it,—how much better it would be ?”

“No,” said John: “I don’t. I go to church, and don’t swear; and I don’t *feel* as if it was important to do any better than that. You say it is, and so does the minister; so I suppose it is true. Perhaps some day I’ll see it so.”

“It is the only thing that can *surely* keep you from evil,” began Agatha.

“Don’t Christians sometimes fall into tremendous sins ?” asked John.

“Sometimes they do,” replied Agatha.

“And do those who are not Christians invariably become immoral ?” asked John again.

“No,” said Agatha, “Yet you can be as moral as you please, and yet fail of heaven

at last. You can be almost saved, and yet entirely lost. I have found so much trouble mixed in this earthly life, John, that I need a sure hope of a perfect and glorious life, to sustain me."

"Well, after all, Agatha," said John, "I have great hopes in this life. I thought I hadn't, that they were lost; but they are all coming up bright as ever. I shall press on to be a great man, and be learned enough to be lifted, like Saul, head and shoulders above my fellow-men."

"I hope so," said Agatha; "but, while your feet are treading the high places of this earth, I want to see your hands taking hold on the good things of the world to come."

Mr. Stafford could not let his boy go again from home unwarned of what seemed to be his chief danger.

"John," he said, when one day they were

alone, "you know I've had a great deal of trouble one way and another with drinking. I had a constant worry from it while Agatha's mother's family were living; there's Uncle Jerry makes me ashamed every day of my life; and there's the other trouble,—worse than all. Of course I'm particularly anxious that you should keep clear of liquor."

"There's no danger of me," said John, confidently.

"But, son John, when you were last away at school, we heard, accidentally, that you would take a glass now and then by way of showing what you could do; and those two bottles of wine, you know."

John blushed a little.

"You need not be afraid for me any more on that score. I've had my lesson in this horrible thing about mother. I shall never have any more to do with the stuff—in that way."

"That's right, that's right," said Mr. Stafford, taking his son's hand. "Very likely there was no need to distress myself about you ; only Agatha made me anxious ; she's very fond of you, John. And by and by you will be all that's left to her."

John looked anxiously at his father at this hint.

"Oh, I'm all right yet," said Mr. Stafford ; "but I'm by no means as young as I used to be, and these things have worn on me."

So John got ready for school ; and on a clear April day, when Nick was working busily on the flower-borders, and the blue-birds were raising a tumult in the orchards, he shook hands with his father and Agatha, and started for the depot, carrying with him, on his way to school, more than half their hearts.

Going through the town, he came across Uncle Jerry, leaning against a lamp-post,

and trying to put on his felt hat, a wide-brimmed, low-crowned hat, which, as he was trying to get it on upside down, as soon as released from his grasp, would fall to the sidewalk. He would then, with great difficulty, pick it up; for Uncle Jerry had arrived at such girth that stooping was a tedious business for him. As he stooped, he would apostrophize his hat: "O you idiot! O you dunce! O you jackanapes! can't you stay on my head?" A crowd of small boys stood by, laughing. Uncle Jerry spied John. "Nevvy, lend us a string to tie on this hat. I believe it's got an imp in it: see how it goes: there it is again."

John walked brusquely past him, burning with indignation that such a miserable creature could claim kindred with him.

"Old sot!" he said: "why can't he use things in moderation!"

"Moderation!" It is what many are willing

to talk about, who are utterly unable to put it in practice.

With the new scenes, occupations, and companionships at school, John's feelings about his mother, lost much of their keenness: he could forget her position sometimes, or, remembering it, have less pain and mortification over it; and, unfortunately, less disgust, with the evil that had wrought her ruin.

He meant never to drink any more: but the rules of his school were not over-strict; and there were some lads there who liked to drop into a saloon, and call for a glass of ale, or of toddy, or a cobbler, and who were not slow to invite the new comer to do the same.

“Thank you. I don’t care to. No: I believe not:” so John.

“What’s amiss? Belong to these new Temperance Lights?”

“No,” said John, promptly.

“What’s your reason, then? Come, fork it over:” But John’s reason was one that could not be divulged.

“ ’Fraid of a headache?” asked one, sneeringly.

“I’m not so raw as that,” said John, bristling at the remark.

“Try a tip,” said another: “it’s the best thing in the world to keep off colds, or to clear up one’s whistle, if one’s got to spout on the stage in the chapel.”

John was in no danger of colds, neither did his ‘whistle’ need clearing for the declamatory exercises; but, in less than two months, he had yielded, and duly sucked a mint-julep through a straw, and was ready “just to take a taste, and pass an opinion,” on any new combination of liquor and et-ceteras, which the bar-keeper, a right-hand man of Satan, chose to get up for the delectation of unwary boys.

Generally, after a letter from Agatha or his father, John would have a short season of entire abstinence — and even when not in these fits of penitence, he was never visibly under the influence of liquor ; he never took enough to flush his cheek, or trip his tongue. The boys called him “ Professor Particular ” sometimes, as he never openly violated rules, and was diligent at his books. His teachers made glad his father’s heart by their commendations, and, when Mr. Stafford came to take his son to college to pass his examination, he was proud indeed of his thoroughness and proficiency, and the evident favor with which he was received by the Faculty.

Agatha came to attend the school exhibition.

“ You have not grown a bit, John,” she said. “ I used to think you would be tall, like father ; but I believe you are going to be a *little* man.”

“Your best goods are done up in small parcels,” laughed John.

“You’ve studied too hard,” said Agatha: “you must spend your vacation in hunting and fishing and taking long tramps after ‘specimens’ that will develop your muscles.”

What would Agatha have felt, had she known the truth, that John’s growth was being hindered by poison, imbibed under the name of wine, whiskey, or brandy!

The fact was, that, as these things did not at once affect John’s head, neither made him sick nor stupid, he did not realize how much he took. That he *liked* them was now a fact; yet a fact which he would fiercely have denied. To like them savored too much of Uncle Jerry, and of his mother.

Mrs. Stafford was pining to see John; and, while her husband thought he could not take their son to visit her under present circumstances, Agatha volunteered to accom-

pany John to the asylum. "It may do them both good," she said.

Mrs. Stafford was looking much better than when she left home. The *regime* of the establishment was benefiting her physically; but she was peevish and unhappy, thought herself dreadfully abused in being sent to such a place, accused Agatha of treachery and unkindness, and declared she was refused "things really necessary to her health." Agatha knew what she meant. It was an unhappy visit; but seeing his mother, and being continually with Agatha, had a restraining influence on John. His father concluded that he had "sown his wild oats" and was now ready to "settle down;" and Agatha laid aside her fears, and looked cheerfully forward to her brother's future. In her love for him, she did no castle-building for herself: the rose-hues, and the glories of the coming years, were all for John. Aga-

tha's life was an earnest grapple with every-day cares and duties. Not only the affairs of the household, but much of her father's business rested on her now: he was growing feeble. How well for her that she was strengthened by heaven-sent angels, in the weary way! How much wearier that way had been, had she known that John had a secret, shame-faced *liking* for the demi-john!



CHAPTER IV.

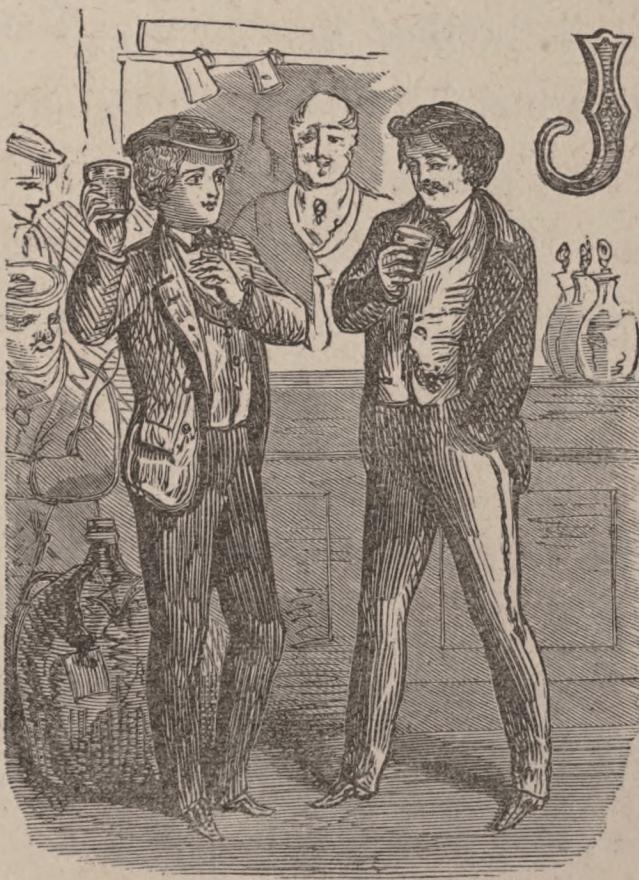
When John was as strong as the Demijohn.





CHAPTER IV.

When John was as strong as the Demijohn.



J

OHN was at college. He had secured a pleasant room and a gentlemanly “chum.” As he wrote Agatha, he was all ready for “putting into his

studies pretty lively;” he was also ready

for all the ills a “Fresh” is heir to. John was resolved to make his mark as a student: at the same time he did not object to a little fun. He had joined a literary society; and, being possessed of a good deal of talent, and not averse to making an exhibition of it, he soon became popular with dashing Sophomores, and grave and reverend Seniors, as well as with his brother Freshmen. The confidence with which he spoke of his future profession, and his passion for chemistry and other branches of natural science, gained him the sobriquet of “Doctor:” he was also soon possessed of another title, the “Caterer.” Whenever anything good to eat was going about, John was sure to secure a part; not that he was particularly fond of good living himself, but that he liked to “stand treat” to his acquaintances, and enjoyed the merriment his feats occasioned.

One evening, just after dark, he put his

head out of his window, when it suddenly bumped against something swinging down from the room above; grasping the object, he found a can of oysters. It was evident that the boys above stairs had been arranging for oyster-soup, and that some one, probably a tutor, had suspected the game, and interrupted it by an untimely visit. The fellows, therefore, had fastened the can to a stout string, and dropped it from the window, to escape discovery. The lid of the can was pried up, and salt and pepper had been added.

“Sam,” said John to his room-mate, “run over to the hotel and get us some crackers;” and, as Sam hastened away, John drew from the closet a tin pail, kept for emergencies of this kind, and emptied the oysters into it, filling the can instead with water. He was quick and quiet, and secured the can in the string as before.

Sam returning, he and John partook of oysters and crackers to their vast content.

“That was a dull trick of those ‘Sophs’ overhead,” said Sam.

The “Sophs” overhead, however, knew to whom to attribute the loss of their shell-fish. “We’ll go to-morrow night, before Society, and smoke ‘em out,” they said.

The next night, being Friday, Sam was out of his room, but John was busy over a tough piece of Greek, when the two Sophs, who had lost their oysters, accompanied by three of their friends, came in, armed with pipes; and, fastening doors and windows began to “smoke” John. He saw their game, and sat, his hands clenched in his hair, studying fiercely, as in childish days, as long as he could see the page. Despite all his resolution, he began to choke a little.

“Well, John,” said the leading Soph, “how do you like it? find it as tasty as

oyster-soup, eh ? ” and he blew from his mouth a huge volume of smoke, formed into ring after ring, to the intense admiration of his companions, who had not attained the proficieney of this excellent Soph.

“ I’ll tell you what it is ! ” cried John ; “ you may use me up pretty well on tobacco, for it’s a thing I’m not much used to, and never had great liking for ; but if you were on the subject of a good stiff glass of whiskey, I’ll wager I could take one that would floor you completely, and I’d not feel it a particle.”

“ Think so ? ” said the Soph, blowing more rings.

“ I *know* so , ” said John, confidently, fairly longing for a glass of punch to “ straighten him after that confounded smoke , ” as he said to himself.

“ Come now , ” said his aggressor ; “ I’m not such a new hand at whiskey as you may

imagine. I'll step over to the hotel bar, and try it with you. But mind you, if I lay you flat, and the Faculty get after you, it is your own fault."

"All right," said John. So his guests put up their pipes, and, unfastening the door, escorted John to their favorite hotel.

"Call for what you like," said John, "and the one who is half-seas-over first, foots the bill."

"Done," replied the other, winking at his companions.

It was a fact that John was not easily affected by liquor, and he tossed off, as if it had been water, a quantity which reddened the eyes and excited the brain of his Sophomore acquaintance. The other young men stood looking on.

"Come, Joe," said one; "the little Fresh is too much for you: you're on debate to-night, and you won't be able to open your

head, if you take any more. Besides, you're noisy when you're tipsy, and you'll have 'Tute' round after us. Come ahead out of here."

John made no objections to these remarks, and Joe dimly saw their wisdom; so the boys set out for the society hall,—Joe, with difficulty, restrained from singing an over-lively tune as they crossed the Campus.

John, by his drinking, had been stirred to extra mental activity. Joe, on the contrary, was absurd and illogical; and, after trying a speech, sat down amid the laughter of his friends.

This was the first time John had drank any since coming to college, and he felt worried and ashamed about it. He thought of his father and Agatha; he remembered his mother. "Hoh," he said to himself, impatiently, "it isn't at all as if I had a habit, as if I drank often, or meant to keep on. I

could drop it any time I chose." And so he could, then.

Doctor Day, the eminent Superintendent of the Binghamton Inebriate Asylum, says that there is one safeguard for those inclined to indulge in strong drink, which he has never known to fail. That is to prayerfully read each day certain passages from the Bible which bear upon their infirmity. As "Preserve me, O God: for in thee do I put my trust." "Draw me not away with the wicked, and with the workers of iniquity," and several others. This was a help which our foolish, self-destroying John omitted. He had a Bible, which Agatha entreated him to read; but that Bible lay on a shelf, covered with dust. He was constant at church and chapel exercises, because he was careful to obey the rules of the college, that he might have honor in the eyes of the Faculty. John was prayerless: poor lad! he stood alone against the temptations of the

world, the flesh, and the devil, saying he was strong enough to rise above them all. We shall see that his strength was utter weakness.

During the early part of winter, one of the professors was obliged, for a short time, to hear one of his classes at his own house: the dining-room was prepared for the recitation, and a double row of chairs placed along one side of the apartment. John, as was to be expected from his title of 'Caterer,' chose a back seat just in front of the sideboard; and, during the recitation, confident of being unobserved by the absorbed and near-sighted professor, he reached softly back, and found the sideboard unlocked. Presently he slipped his hand within the door, and discovered the professor's cake-basket, full of goodly slices. He took them one by one, and passed them along the line to his friends, who quietly bestowed them in their pockets. After recitation, he invited the possessors of cake to his room, obtained a bottle of wine,

and so treated them to a lunch. The next evening he repeated the operation ; but the third occasion of their appearance at the professor's, they found the sideboard locked !

Apples were scarce and very dear. John, one afternoon, going through the town, found a stupid old countryman, with extra fine pippins for sale, from his sled, who solicited John to buy. John had in his vest pocket, a small, gilt advertising medal, bright and new ; just for a joke, he handed it to the old man crying, “ There’s your three-dollar gold-piece ! give us a bushel of your pippins, and fork over the change.”

To his amazement, the old fellow “ accepted the coin,” carried the fruit to his room, and gave him the change.

That evening the boys laughed heartily over this “ sell.” “ You’re a brick, John,” said Joe. “ You’re just a bushel of pippins and your change richer for your bargain.”

“Hold on there,” said John: “the fun’s enough for me. You don’t suppose I’ll keep the old chap’s money! No, sir! I know his name, and I shall send him a genuine three-dollar bill. I’m above cheating.”

Some of the boys applauded, and some hooted this resolution: but John did as he said, and the next day the old man got his money.

Meanwhile John offered to give his friends a “treat.” He procured whiskey, sugar, spices and so on; and, roasting some of the apples, had them presently bobbing about in a pail of hot toddy. From this kind of treats in which John indulged, he became known as a young man who “could and did take a social glass now and then, and none the worse for it,” as his companions said.

One night, a number of students were in John’s room: they had occupied all the

chairs, the wood-box, and the window-sill, and John had perched himself on the bar that was between the posts at the foot of his bed.

“I tell you now,” said the eldest of the group, a young man whom every one respected, “this whiskey is a dangerous passenger for a man to take on board for the voyage of life: he is usually bound to scuttle the ship. I’ve got an uncle, a lawyer he is; he’s got money and position, and he’s A number one at his profession: he’s nearly swamped by whiskey, and he knows it.”

“Why don’t he quit it, then?” said John.

“That’s easier said than done. He can’t.”

“What’s he going to do about it?” asked Joe. “Knock under?”

“He’s gone, of his own accord, to an inebriate asylum.” How John’s heart beat! Would it come out any way that *his mother* was at such a place? If it did he thought

he should grasp his hat, and run off somewhere,—down into the river, or up, miles away, to John Brown's Tract, and never come back. The talk was flowing on, ruthlessly, over his unspoken agonies. “There's some hope for him, you see, because he has gone voluntarily. People sent there by their friends, without any interest in the cure themselves, seldom get any help, so the statistics say.”

“I know a fellow,” said Sam, “a rich chap, from our town. He got to be a drunkard, and he was ashamed of it. He sent himself to an asylum double quick; and, after a while, he was thought cured, and was sure of himself, I can tell you. He started for home. His mother and sister lived there alone: they were glad enough. But, if you'll believe it, he got tempted to try a sling on his way home, and he was carried into his house dead drunk and put to bed. Next

morning, when he got his peepers open, and realized how matters had gone, he thought he'd kill himself; he said as much out loud, and made a dash for his razor. His sister had been sitting at the foot of the bed out of sight. 'No you don't, not this time,' she says; so she flung the razor out of the window, and offered to go back with him to the asylum, and try it over again. He had learned enough to put no confidence in himself; and the next time he came out 'right side up with care,' and he's staid so ever since."

"I've heard of one fellow," said John, "who went back the third time, and has held out sober since that."

John thought the talk on this dangerous theme would never end.

"It is a fact," said the student who had opened the conversation, "that when once a man has become accustomed to the use of

liquor, he is liable, after any length of abstinence, to fall a prey again, if he takes *just one glass*.* One glass with a reformed drunkard does not go alone. If he gives it up, he must touch not, taste not, handle not, afterwards."

"That's so," said a youth who had not before spoken: "if he is persuaded into one glass, he's a gone fish. I had a cousin who reformed and was temperate ten years, and somebody got him to drink just once with him, and he went from bad to worse, and died of delirium tremens."

"The only man who has self-control, is he who never drank," said the leader of the discussion.

"Then," ventured John, "there are few of us here who have self-control."

"Doctor Day has discovered, by microscopic examination, that alcohol opens a series of cells in the brain, which never after wholly collapse, and thus while life lasts, they remain always ready to receive the invisible demon. For this reason there can be no permanent *cure* for drunkenness." — *New York Tribune*.

“And you are getting farther and farther from it all the time,” said the young man: “the best way is to quit all use of liquors. For my part, I like to stand up before heaven and earth a *free man*, not the tool of any habit. I’d as soon be a negro slave, toiling in the rice fields, as a slave of King Demi-john.”

“So had I,” said John; “but I hold that a man that is half a man can drink when he wants to, and let it alone when he chooses. I can.”

“If you’re going to hold to that opinion,” said his friend, “I’m glad I am not in your boots.”

“I’ll come out as even with the world as you will, Lester;” said John, tartly.

College Faculties are generally wide awake to the ways of “the boys,” and the characteristics of each one are pretty well known. John, while liked for many good points,

and respected as a diligent and gifted student, was yet suspected of indulging in whiskey potations, and hanging now and then about bar-rooms and saloons. Going one afternoon off the Campus, arm in arm with Joe, they were quietly followed by one of the professors, a thin, elderly man, who wore a brown cloak, and a low-crowned, flapping-brimmed white felt hat. The lads called him "Quaker." "Quaker's giving us chase," said Joe, softly; "he thinks we're going to a saloon. Come on down toward 'Sherry Corner.'" This was more than half a mile away, and, as the boys walked on laughing, never looking back, the professor came after, thinking the walk long, but the end good. He was sure they were going into the saloon at Sherry Corner. That reached, "Wheel to the right," whispered Joe; "faster now; we'll make tracks towards the 'Bridge House.'" That lay on the river bank, nearly

a mile off, not a reputable place at all ; and, as the tired professor hurried to keep his game in sight, he groaned inwardly, but was resolved to follow them down, if they were shameless enough to go for bad whiskey to the “Bridge House.”

“Wheel to the right again!” chuckled Joe, Bridge House attained. “This path’s none of the smoothest. Don’t your legs ache, John? Mine do. Double quick, now: I’ll lay you a dollar the Quaker’s legs ache worse than ours. Here’s his pay for tracking us. Straight as a die now for Tompkin’s Station!”

Half a mile more. There was a bar-room at Tompkin’s, and the professor thought his boys had come a roundabout way to reach it. He felt stiff and sore; but the boys appeared unconscious of the chase, and he was undoubtedly in for it. Tompkin’s Station was reached. “Now, John, my lad,” said

the tireless Joe, “get your breath, and we’ll trot home like a lightning express. The Quaker’s in for it. This is his best road home, if he ever expects to get there ; and if he don’t remember this square we’ve taken him about for a few days, I’m out of my reckoning.”

Between them and the College were several grög-shops, and the professor felt himself bound, as Joe said, to put in his best strokes, for fear the boys would get in and out of one, unseen. On they went, and reached the Campus just out of sight of their pursuer. They coolly leaned against the fence, joking, and watching a game of ball.

“There, he heaves in sight round that corner, John,” said Joe. “Holy Peter ! isn’t he tired ? Now keep your face straight while I overhaul him.” The chagrined professor came along. Joe politely held the gate open, and lifted his hat. “*Good-evening, Pro-*

fessor: been out walking? So have we; we've stretched ourselves nicely!"

The professor having disappeared behind his own front door, the lads sat down under a tree, and laughed immoderately. "It's the best joke of the season," said Joe.

John, lying awake that night, the moonlight coming in at his windows, and Sam snoring at his side, began to think it was not so good a joke after all. He had been suspected of being a hanger-on of taverns and low saloons,—a tippler! His cheeks flushed hotly. What would pure-minded Agatha, what would his gray-haired father say? He was almost ready to forswear all places where liquors were sold, all liquors themselves, forever.

He could do it, he said; and we say yes: he could. Why did he not? He thought what the boys would say; he thought "how a little tip brightened him up somehow:"

he did not like to call himself a coward, and get behind a pledge as a fence for safety, so he told himself. "I'll quit for a while," said John. "I can paddle my canoe, in spite of demijohn."

It has long been a custom among Christian nations, to observe an annual day of prayer for schools and colleges. This day of supplication yearly proves true the promise, "Call, and I will answer;" for ever, in a greater or less degree, the influences of the Spirit descend, like dew or showers, and the time of prayer becomes frequently the spiritual birth-time of the youth. Such day of prayer had come; and, when Agatha went alone to the house of God, the case of her young brother lay heavy on her soul. She besought God as one who could not be denied.

Now was the golden hour of opportunity for John. A deep seriousness pervaded the

college; the spiritual as well as the intellectual interests of the pupils pressed on the Faculty. John, with others, felt the drawings of divine grace; he pondered should he cast himself helpless and suppliant on heavenly mercy? Lester and Sam came out boldly on the Lord's side: they were not ashamed of the cross of Christ; having found that good thing, the peace of God, they desired that others should possess it also. At this time, Joe was a serious hinderance to John. He was a dashing, witty boy, ever on the alert for amusement; a boy accustomed to domination among his mates.

“I don’t object to religion,” said Joe to John; “but let us have a taste of life first: we’ll try the world before we try Methodism;” by which title Joe meant religion. “Piety, John, is more becoming to women and old fogies, than to jolly young larks, like you and me.”

A voice from John's inmost soul suggested, that Death, the Archer, shot down many jolly young larks even in their jolliest prime.

"Come, fellows," said Sam and Lester, "cast in your lot with us, and you'll never repent it: we will bring you where you will yet do good."

"Yes," said Sam: "we've found a safe anchorage and a strong anchor."

"We don't want anchorage," quoth Joe: "we're bound on a cruise—eh, John?"

"Well," said Lester, "you must have a compass and a chart, or you'll meet unexpected shipwreck."

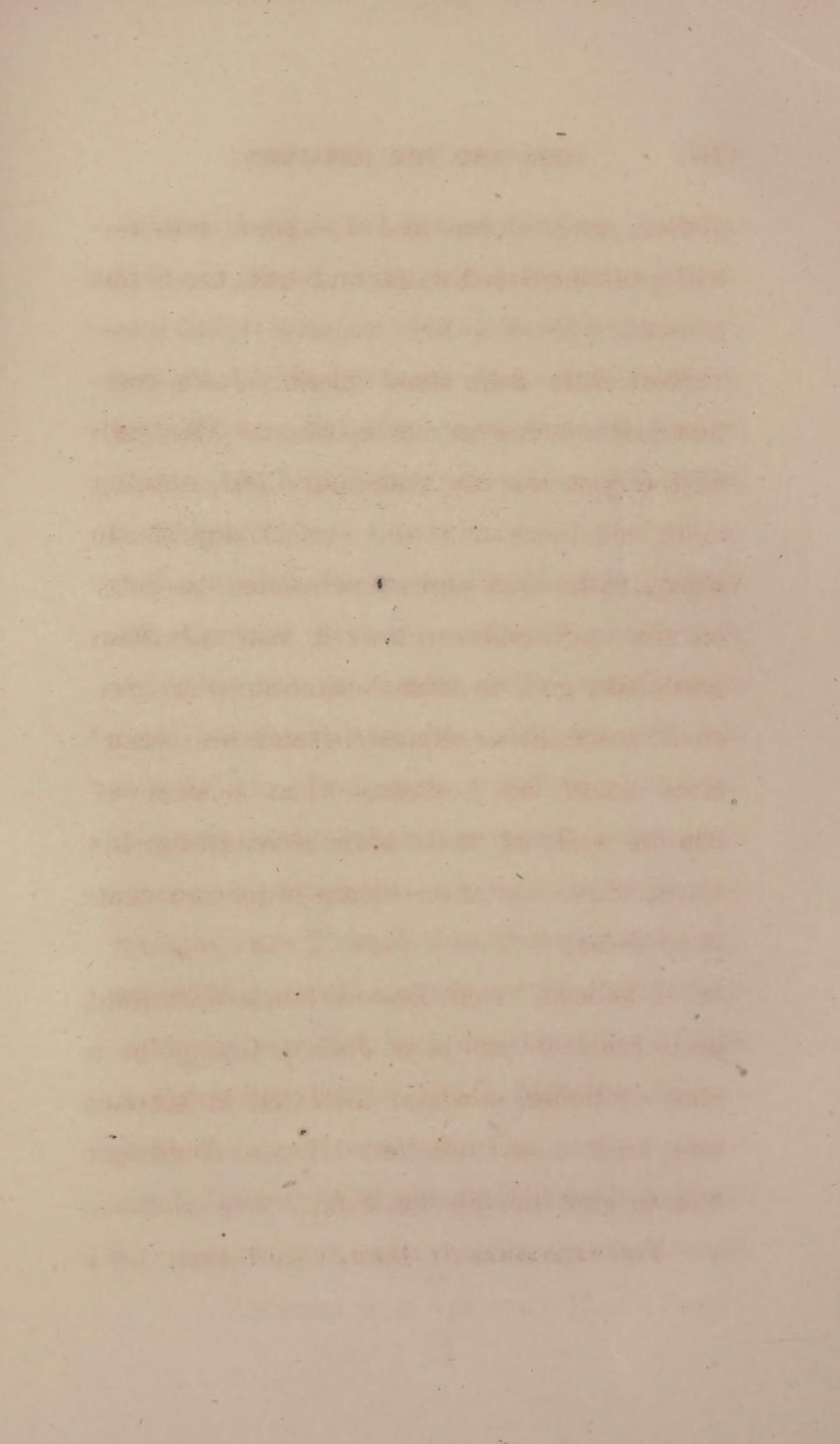
"Come, now," said Joe, "we're only a proof of scriptural veracity. 'Two shall be sleeping in one bed, and one shall be taken and the other left.' John's lost his room-mate in the good cause, and I'm out, on your account, Lester. I don't see but we'd better trade chums; you two saints can get to-

gether, and John and I—poor saints—will grub out Greek roots, and haze the Sophs alone."

Meanwhile John stood silent. Joe's reckless jeers jarred on his spirits. "The path of the just *was* as a shining light, shining more and more unto the perfect day." He knew it; he was almost persuaded to enter on that path and run toward heaven. John hesitated; and in that hesitation what gracious possibilities slipped beyond his reach! How could he hesitate, when powers of heaven and of hell were striving for his spirit, when hesitation meant bitter and complete defeat.

"I believe," said Lester, much distressed over John, "that it is John's liking for a glass of liquor now and then that is keeping him back from religion. If we could get him to sign the pledge, Sam."

"You mention it then," said Sam. "I can't: he'll flare up in a minute."





"I am now safe," said John. Page 161.

“We’ll sign a pledge ourselves,” said Lester, “and then we can ask him with a better grace. Let us get up a College Temperance Society.”

“Done,” said Sam; and to work they went. A tutor and two of the professors took much interest in this movement, and the society was soon organized. Lester urged John to join it. If John had yielded to good counsel then, he would doubtless have been able to keep his pledge. King Demijohn was not yet stronger than John’s word of honor. But John would not be so bound.

“Sign and be safe,” said Lester.

“I *am* now safe,” said John. “Do you think I would give up my prospects, my credit, my influence among men, for drink?”

“Not now,” said Lester; “but you know not whereunto this thing will grow. If the beginning of strife is as the letting out of water, so is the beginning of liquor-drinking. Leave it off before it be meddled with.”

“ You and I may meet somewhere in life after our college days are ended, Lester,” said John, angrily: “ see, then, if I am not as strong a man as you.”

“ You may be a better man, as you have more ability naturally than I,” said Lester, mildly. “ You can insure success by forever abjuring that which *may* lead you astray.”

“ My success is sure now,” said John. “ I am not so weak as to need a pledge to keep me upon my feet.”

Summer came, examinations were passed; John stood high in his class. His father and Agatha were coming to commencement. Agatha, ever anxious for her brother’s happiness, had proposed that he should get up a hunting and fishing party to camp out on one of the Thousand Islands, for a week or two. She even thought their father would go with them, and so renew his youth. John asked Lester and Sam to join him on the

excursion ; so also he invited Joe. " You'll have to toe the mark before Agatha, Joe," he said, laughing. But, in the midst of all these bright anticipations, came over the wires bad news for John. He must go home in haste, for his father lay at the point of death. Here he could prove the hollowness of the friendship of the wicked, for Joe slunk away from the sight of John's distressed face, while Sam and Lester hurried about, packing his valise, getting his tickets, and promising to pack his books and clothes, and send them on after him. So, by their help, in half an hour he was hurrying to his home.

Doctor Hathway met John at the door with a cordial and sympathizing hand-clasp.

" Is father living ? " asked John.

" He will probably hold out a few hours longer," said the doctor.

John rushed by him towards his parent's

room. At the turn of the stairs, Agatha met him, and clasped him in her arms.

“Let me go to father,” said John.

“Wait a little,” whispered his sister. “He asked us all to go out, that he might talk to mother alone.”

“Is mother here?” gasped John.

“We sent for her, and she got here at daybreak. Doctor Hathway’s son went for her.”

In the dim light of that upper landing, the brother and sister stood facing each other. Tears rained over Agatha’s white face. John was greatly moved: he had seldom seen his sister weep.

At last the bedroom door was set open. John and Agatha entered. Mrs. Stafford sat near the head of the bed, her face hidden in the pillow, weeping bitterly. John’s whole thought was with his dying father. He knelt beside the bed.

“I am glad you have got here, son. I shall soon be away from you all.”

The attendants had gathered at the foot of the bed ; the doctor was near his patient’s pillow ; on one side were John and Agatha ; but on the other sat the poor erring wife weeping alone. Agatha saw it. It was her nature to stand by the fallen, to comfort the weak. She left her brother, and, going to Mrs. Stafford, threw her arm protectingly about her. Her father noticed the action : his look thanked his daughter ; yet he felt that by the mother, in the hour of grief, should stand her son, the only one of her children who had been left her.

“John,” he faltered, “John, never neglect your mother.”

“I never will,” said John, gently.

“John, never grieve or desert your sister ; she has been like a mother to you.”

“Never, father,” said John ; now his whole heart was in his speech.

“John, be a strong man, a good man; do a man’s work in the world, and never do anything to bring reproach upon your father’s name.”

Mr. Stafford was a moral man, a highly respectable man; but he was not a Christian man, and he had no Christian counsels or benedictions to leave his son. Agatha felt the terrible want, and it increased her sorrow tenfold.

At night, the lonely family sat in the parlor; the rose-vines swayed in at the open window; the breath of the flowers floated from the garden; royal summer reigned in field and wood, and over her beauty the starry hosts were watching. No words were spoken by the bereaved three: theirs was a grief too deep for speech.

Agatha, rousing from a deep muse, saw that her stepmother had softly left them. She rose, oppressed with care, and looked

for her through the quiet house. She was not in the solemn room where her dead was lying; but, in the room where her husband had died, she stood by the dressing-table, pouring some brandy from a flask that had been brought there for the patient's use.

She started guiltily as Agatha entered. The girl took the flask and glass from the woman's unresisting hand.

“Mother,” she said, reproachfully, “did you not promise father that you would drink no more?”

Mrs. Stafford sat down in a chair near her, and groaned aloud.

“Agatha, I *can't* let it alone.”

Agatha felt as much pity as either anger or contempt.

“Suppose you go to bed, mother, and I will sit by you till you fall asleep.”

Mrs. Stafford consented, and Agatha sat reading chapter after chapter from the Bible,

in her low, musical tones, until the unhappy woman was unmistakably asleep.

Then she went out for Sara.

“Sara, go about the house and collect every drop of wine, brandy, or liquors of any kind, and have Nick box them up nicely and send them to the — Street Hospital, Boston, before he goes to bed.”

Sara scrupulously obeyed.

“Bless her soul,” she said to Nick, referring to Miss Agatha, “it’s a hard burden she has to bear. For my part, Nick, it’s my resolve that I’ll stand by Miss Agatha, as long as I’m a living woman. She ain’t had all her troubles yet, it’s my idee.”

Next morning, the Stafford mansion stood, for the first time since its building, purged from every drop of liquor that could intoxicate.

The next morning, an hour before the funeral, John and Agatha stood by their father’s open coffin.

“Agatha,” said John, “this is a hard thing for both of us; but you shall never miss anything I can be to you. You are going to have heavy trouble with poor mother, I think; and you are more patient with her failings than I am, and I thank you for it.”

“She has been a great help and comfort to me. Years ago, I don’t know what I should have done without her,” replied Agatha, ever more ready to think of the good past than of the bad present. “But, John, since we see what misery intemperance can bring, let us be forever against it.”

“With all my heart,” said John, cordially.

“I am willing to take a pledge,” said Agatha.

“Nonsense! you don’t need it,” returned John.

“Perhaps not; but I am willing to take it, all the same. Are you?”

“No; I am not. It is a coward’s vow. But, Agatha, by this coffin, I solemnly prom-

ise you never to be intoxicated, and there's my hand on it!"

How much better if John had promised never to taste the fatal cup; but Agatha dared press the matter no further.

At that very time, Mrs. Stafford, wretched over her husband's death, and mortified at thought of seeing former acquaintances, was craving a glass of liquor; and finding the house emptied of it, gave Nick money to go to the druggist and buy a little for *medicine*.

"Sara," said Nick, in conference with the maid behind a lilac bush, "here's this money. I daren't tell her I couldn't go, and I ain't to be made a party to breaking Miss's heart. Whatever will I do with the change, for go I'll not."

"Keep out of sight," said the wily Sara, "and I'll hand the money to Miss, and tell her I guess it belongs to some of them. She's that taken up grieving she'll not notice."

Agatha appreciated her stepmother's feeling. She kept close beside her, confronted her with kind looks and words, and, as friends were kind, and gathered about them with a sympathy ignoring past errors, the widow got through the day pretty well.

The question, what was to be done with Mrs. Stafford, was a perplexing one. Mr. Stafford had left Doctor Hathway guardian to John ; and the third of his property, left for the use of his wife during her life, was left in trust in the hands of an old friend. Mr. Stafford had advised his wife to return to the Asylum unless she was sure she was cured. It was evident that she was not cured ; but she did not want to go back. She fairly hated the Asylum. "It is strange she dislikes it so," said Dr. Hathway. "It is truly a beautiful home — fine building, grounds, every convenience, every comfort, every luxury ; servants in plenty, the best

of fare, even good society and religious privileges."

This was all true ; but Mrs. Stafford said she would not return.

" Well," said Agatha, " John will be away, and I have no one else to care for. Let her stay here, and I will try and cure her, or keep her from injury, myself. She was good to me, once—very good."

Agatha urged John to spend part of his vacation, as he had intended, so that he might be fresh for the next year's studies. She disliked to have him go off alone, for she knew he would be exposed to many temptations ; but she said to herself that John was no longer a child—he must meet the world, face to face, as a man.

He was to go forth, for pleasure and for duty, from his shadowed home. She followed him with her prayers. Agatha had need of prayers. Her stepmother *would*

drink. First one and then another, of servants, neighboring children, or strangers, would she bribe to bring her liquor, and to liquor she had added opium. She was never rude, noisy or cross, when under the influence of these poisons. She would steal off to her room to indulge her craving, in secret, and then, as realizing her helplessness, lie quietly on her bed, waiting for the torpor that never failed to come. With this woman in the house, Agatha was a prisoner in her home. She was ashamed to invite friends. She dared not go much abroad. Except to attend church services, she rarely went beyond her gate. Her flowers, her pet birds, her books, and her painting were companions. A settled gravity and tender sadness came upon her face. She was not made old, sour or haggard ; but quietly her youth and prettiness died, and a noble, chastened face told of a spirit purified by its woes.

Looking back over the past, she ever felt thankful for her decided dismission of Ralph Curtis. He was a skilful and popular lawyer, rising rapidly ; but men said, one to another, “Curtis was drunk to-day ; Curtis was drinking last night. He cannot go this course very long.”

“One thing,” said Agatha, “I shall never have the grief to be—a drunkard’s wife.”

Good friends were watching over Agatha, and, when two years had gone by in this miserable guard of Mrs. Stafford, they began to protest. Permission from the Court must be obtained to gain the habitual drunkard the refuge of the Asylum, if they would receive her. This being accomplished, Agatha determined to close her house for a season, and give herself needed rest by going where John was at College, and securing board, that she might have the pleasure of being near her brother during his Senior year.

When John had been at home for his vacations, he had been a great comfort to his sister. She could see no fault in him ; his one failing had not obtained the mastery yet, and was always held in check by Agatha's presence. In the eager race for superiority, in the darling hope of mastering his competitors and coming out with first honors, the crack student of his class, John had little leisure for frolicking or for wine suppers. He left the first for "Freshs" and "Sophs;" the last, for idlers of the Senior year. Yet John had imbibed the notion that wine stimulated the brain so as to fit it for intellectual exercise ; and fiery wines, and crackers soaked therein, often served him for a dinner, or as a refection during some long night of study. "Wine and brains!" cried John, when Lester had warned him that evil would ensue. Lester had now finished his collegiate course, and

was attending medical lectures. "I'll beat you in our profession, yet, Lester!" said John.

Sam, John's room-mate, still was plodding on. Not as keen as John; but thorough and true, beloved and respected of all his friends. "Sam Snail," John jokingly called him. Sam was to study for the ministry.

Joe had left college, in dire disgrace,—expelled. John loftily said, "I told him so. Joe hadn't the least morsel of self-control; a little liquor would get into his head, and make him act like a fool. He didn't know enough to let it alone, as, under those circumstances, he should have done. As for me," said John, "I'll not knock under to a whiskey jug. I'm as strong, any day, as King Demijohn."

CHAPTER V.

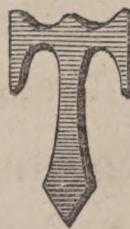
John Stands or falls with the Demijohn.





CHAPTER V.

John stands or falls with Demijohn.



HE long-expected commencement was drawing near. John, with all college honors, was to leave his Alma Mater. In the midst of the excitement

of the last preparations, Agatha received a

letter from the superintendent of the asylum where Mrs. Stafford had been placed, saying that the poor woman had made her escape from their care. Agatha at once returned home, hoping that her step-mother had gone thither; but, nothing having been heard from her, she engaged several people to prosecute a search for the fugitive, and then returned to her brother. She carefully concealed from him the evil news of his parent, for she would have nothing mar the proud and joyous hour of his well-earned success.

Commencement over, John urged his sister to take a pleasure trip with him, and, anxious ever for his gratification, she consented. One thing deeply grieved her. John always concluded his dinners with a bottle of wine; and she knew he was frequently laughing and joking, and taking a glass of liquor at the bar in the hotels where they stopped. John felt himself now “too much of a man” to

defer to his sister's opinion on the subject of drinking. He loftily said to himself that "Agatha was a good girl; but a fellow could not be tied to her apron-string, or made an old fogey to gratify her whims;" and to her looks or words of remonstrance he returned, "Let me alone, Agg. I can take care of myself. I know perfectly well what I am about, and shall never get into any trouble."

Their return home was attended with evil omen. Uncle Jerry heard on what train they were expected, and mumbled over his cups that the "children must have somebody to welcome them, guessed he'd go down and do a little honor to the young graduate."

Pursuant to this charitable intention, Uncle Jerry, his hat and coat much the worse for many encounters with lamp-posts and sidewalks, reeled toward the depot. He was very much more than comfortably drunk: indeed, so befogged were his senses that,

stumbling upon the platform — to the chagrin of Agatha and John, who proposed escaping from him upon the other side of the station — Uncle Jerry, seeing the brightness of the engine's reflector, and much struck by the huge mass of machinery, doffed his hat, and held out his hand to it, and, in the midst of this salutation, rolled over the edge of the platform, down upon the rails. There was a cry of horror, and John, springing after the capsized drunkard, dragged him by the collar just out of harm's way, as the iron horse went snorting on.

“D-d-d-on’t be so hard on a fellow. This town has the crookedest sidewalks: ain’t-t-t one of ’em — but — but is bewitched,” grunted Uncle Jerry, as his nephew proceeded to jerk him into a sitting posture on a sand-bank. Some old English poet has pictured to us

“Green and yellow melancholy
Sitting on ye sand by ye sea-shore.”

Uncle Jerry was

“Bloated purple drunkenness
Sitting in the sun on a railroad bank.”

He bobbed a little, tried a stave of song, knocked his hat over his eyes, and coolly stretched himself back for a nap. John tossed the station master a quarter dollar to convey the inebriate to his boarding-place, and joined Agatha, who had stood by, watching the scene in disgust.

Uncle Jerry soon gave them more trouble, by being turned drunk into the street, and everybody refusing to board him any longer. Not that he had no means of paying his way, for he had enough; but he was such an unconscionable old drunkard no one would harbor him. John's first care was perforce to search the town over for a shelter for him. Agatha had allowed him to come to their house, to prevent his being left on the street. The inebriate asylum declined to receive

him, and at last board and a room were hired at the country poor-house. Upon these mortifications, it was hard for Agatha to heap another, by telling John that his mother had now for some time disappeared, and all search for her had been fruitless. She did it, however, as gently as she could. John seemed fairly crushed by the blow ; but rallied in a few days, and joined his sister in attending to needed improvements on their house, grounds, and furnishing. John was to study with Doctor Hathway for a few weeks, until the opening of the next term of medical lectures in Philadelphia, and expected to prosecute his researches into his chosen profession during the summers, in the doctor's office, while he passed the requisite three winters in the city.

Agatha thought she would like to go to Philadelphia, to be near her brother during term-time ; but John did not encourage the

idea. It was troublesome to leave her house for so long; and then the truant mother must, if possible, be found and brought home.

Doctor Hathway was highly delighted that his ward had chosen his own profession.

“John, my lad,” he said, “I’m growing old, and want a go-ahead young partner. Once you get your M. D., I will take you in with me, and, when I retire from my practice, you shall have the whole of it; and I’ll retire as soon as I get you on your legs.”

This was kind of the old doctor; it was what he would have done for a son who had chosen to practise medicine. Of course John thanked him; but at home he laughed at the proposition to Agatha.

“I wonder if he thinks *I* will be content to settle down in this rich, spread-out, old fungus town, and just be respectable and make my living. I’ve more ambition than

that. No. I've set my mind on surgery, and I'll come out A number one. See if I don't. I have half a mind to go to Paris a year, and walk the hospitals, after I'm done in Philadelphia."

Agatha resolved that if he went, she would go with him.

In a year, John would be twenty-one, and slip out of Doctor Hathway's guardianship. The old gentleman held no very tight rein over him; supplying him with money and a little fatherly advice being the extent of his efforts as guardian.

But, during this stay of John at home, Agatha one day missed from her store-room the demijohn, now long empty, and grown well-covered with dust and cobwebs; for, as a sign of contempt, that excellent vessel was not honored with a furbishing during semi-annual house-cleanings.

Sick at heart, Agatha prosecuted her search

for the lacking demijohn, and at length discovered it — where years before two empty wine bottles had been found — in the far corner of John's closet.

Agatha's first feeling was to break the offensive demijohn, which she believed in league with her brother against her peace; then she thought of trying the old game of filling the jug with water. It had now in it perhaps half a gallon of rye whiskey. However she dismissed these ideas. She knew that such a course would arouse John's anger, and very likely weaken her influence over him. She was much disturbed, and, having beguiled John into a fishing excursion for the afternoon, sent for Doctor Hathway, to take counsel with him. The doctor confessed that once or twice he had seen John in a saloon, and promised to have a little serious talk on the subject. Accordingly, during one of those last days when Agatha

was counting collars, marking kerchiefs, running the heels of socks, and storing in John's trunk, slippers, dressing-gown, dressing-case, watch-pockets, writing-desk, and twenty other tokens of her sisterly love that might be of use to him during his term in the city, Doctor Hathway elevated his feet to his tabletop, tilted his chair against the wall, wiped his spectacles, laid down a ponderous treatise on Diseases of the Brain, and proceeded to address some remarks to his pupil, John Stafford, A. B.

“John, my lad, you are now going off to the city, and I do not know but I am as anxious to see you do well, as I am for my own son. I hope you'll take no offence at a little plain talk from an old friend. I see one thing that *may* prove a stumbling block in your way. John, you *may* be a little too fond of a glass of liquor.”

John flushed. “Agatha's been putting you up to that; she's stark mad on the subject.”

“I speak from observation,” said the wily doctor, resolved not to betray his fair coadjutor. “I’ve seen you in a saloon sometimes, John.”

“So you have seen nearly every other young man you know; and you can say of me what you cannot say of most of them, sir, that you have never seen me at all under the influence of liquor.

“That may be,” said the doctor; “but, John, in the course of my life I’ve seen a deal of trouble from *intemperance*, none from *temperance*.”

“You’ll live to the age of Methuselah, if you live to see me intemperate,” snapped John.

“Yes, yes: I hope so,” said the good-natured doctor; “but, John, you know liquor has played the mischief with your family; there’s Uncle Jerry —”

“And my mother!” shouted John. “I

thought you'd be the last to throw that up to me."

"I didn't mean to," said the imperturbable doctor. "I'd be the last one to distress you, John; but, my dear fellow, I tell you plainly, if you're to be the man we all want to see you, cut the acquaintance of the Demijohn, for it will sink you, as sure as you're born."

"I've heard enough of this," cried John, angrily; "it has been rung in my ears ever since I was able to trot alone. As for the demijohn I am not afraid of it. I like it, I am as strong as it, and the demijohn and I shall sink or swim together;" and John flung himself out of the office: there was a good deal of his mother in his composition.

John knew the doctor was the truest of friends, Agatha the best of sisters; so, in a walk to the sea-shore and back, he forgot his pique against them, and by tea-time was

as social as ever. He however succeeded in throwing out one observation before he left home that disturbed his sister exceedingly.

“There’s no use of talking to me about liquor. I don’t *mean* to let it hurt me; but if it is a mania with me, if my liking for it is an inherited passion, and it is bound to get the better of me, I’m a gone case, and there’s no use of trying if I would.”

Now John did not believe one word of this, but said it to tease his sister, and he fully succeeded in making her uncomfortable by it.

Jonn had gone to the city. Agatha then got her house in order; brought her hyacinth glasses and crocus jardinette into the sunny bay window of her sitting-room; sent an order to town for new books; put her easel in the best light; procured some new patterns for needlework; got her basket of garments

for the poor ready to be worked at, a little while each day, and indeed mapped out her employments for the winter as best she might. Her heart was much with John, exposed to the enticements of the city; and often went out searching for her lost stepmother, through the waste places of the earth. Perhaps it was this tender love faithfully calling from Agatha's spirit, that insensibly drew Mrs. Stafford homeward. Whether this was so or not, one evening, as Agatha sat sewing by the fire, there was a tap on the window that opened to the porch. Agatha was no coward: she boldly unfastened the window, and looked into the gloom; she could just see a figure muffled in a shawl.

“What is it?” she asked, trembling with a nameless fear.

“Agatha, it's me.”

Agatha grasped the form and pulled the woman into the light and warmth of the

room. It was, indeed, her mother: her hair dishevelled, her dress damp with the night dews, her old shawl carelessly drawn about her, her face wan and haggard, her shoes broken from long journeying.

“I’m glad you’ve come,” choked Agatha, and pushed her into a chair near the fire. “You won’t go off again, if I leave you a minute?”

“I can’t,” said the miserable wreck, wearily.

Agatha called Sara from the kitchen, then stood gazing at her, striving for something to say.

“Oh miss,” cried Sara, pulling her dress, “what ever you do, don’t look like that.”

Agatha slowly pointed to the sitting-room, and Sara, looking in, understood in a minute.

“I’ll light the fire in her room, miss, and fix the bed, and get some clothes, and some supper in there, in just a minute; and them

in the kitchen need see none of the doings until all is right ; ” and in half an hour the trusty Sara was ready to escort Mrs. Stafford to her former room. Agatha went with them. A fire blazed in the grate, the bed freshly made was laid open, clean clothes hung airing near the fire, and on the table in the friendly warmth was a tray of hot supper.

“ Thank you, Sara,” said Agatha, with such earnest voice as more than repaid the maid for her efforts.

Sara brought warm water and brushes, and had soon assisted Mrs. Stafford to be dressed, and had put in order her tangled hair. The poor wanderer sank into the easy-chair drawn out for her, stretched her slippers feet to the fire, and began to eat her supper — not without shame-faced, anxious glances at her daughter and Sara. Agatha’s heart swelled as she thought how she had once seen this woman the mistress of a handsome establish-

ment, the delight of her friends, kind, graceful, pretty, dainty in attire ; and now a wan, uncombed, almost ragged, wanderer, she had come to her own house.

So much for your doings, King Demijohn !

“ You may leave us now, Sara,” said Agatha, when Mrs. Stafford had finished her supper. Sara carried out the tray : Agatha sat down on an ottoman facing her mother, and leaned her head back against the marble side of the mantel.

“ Where have you been, mother ? ” Agatha had been glad to accord that title once, and no errors should ever make her withhold it.

“ I couldn’t bear that place : people had no right to put me where I did not wish to go, like a thief or a crazy person. I went off to Brooklyn.”

“ But how did you live ? ” asked Agatha.

“ I had some money, and I sold my watch

and my jewelry, and I took a few clothes, and I did not need much. I've done no harm but to hide from you — and — you know what I always do, that I *can't* help."

"Drink? Yes, mother."

"I did it shut up in my room though; but my money was gone — I was sick, poor — I wanted a home. I am sorry, Agatha. I know I'm a disgrace to you; but I won't live very long. You won't send me away: will you?"

"No, mother."

Mrs. Stafford began to say something else; but suddenly had a violent fit of coughing, pressing her hand to her side in evident agony.

Agatha put a cushion under her feet, wrapped a knit shawl about her shoulders, and went off to prepare a plaster and a cough syrup. Now that Mrs. Stafford was washed, combed, and attired in some of her

former clothing, it was plain to be seen that she was pale, thin, and ill.

Agatha resolved to keep her at home, and have Doctor Hathway prescribe for her.

During the night, Agatha heard her mother coughing, and went into her room.

“ You must put some more pillows behind me, Agatha : I can’t sleep lying down.”

“ How long have you had this cough ? ” asked Agatha, as she brought the pillows.

“ About six weeks. I take opium for it : can’t you give me some ? ”

“ No, mother,” said Agatha ; “ but,” she added, lighting a night-lamp, “ I can make you a cough tea that will soothe you I think.” Mrs. Stafford, bolstered up in her bed, watched Agatha, as, with her waves of silken hair falling over her shoulders, her blue merino wrapper, belted about her waist in careless haste, she went patiently to work to make something to ease her distress.

“ I’m glad I came back, Agatha, she said : “ you were always good to me.”

Agatha made no reply ; but faithful memory called up a time when she herself had tossed with fever in a restless pain, and over her pillow, through the watches of the night, had bent this woman, then young and fair.

The good deeds Mrs. Stafford had sown in her better days were bearing now ; had borne for years, good harvest for her time of need.

It did not take Doctor Hathway long to make up his mind as to his patient, when Agatha had summoned him next day. He said the use of liquors, as is frequently the case, had induced consumption. There was no help for her : she would go down more or less quickly. All they could do was make her comfortable, — keep up, by care and nourishment, her failing strength, and, by depriving her of whiskey and opium, endeavor to

have her mind clear of those momentous themes suitable for a soul just drifting into eternity. Here was a hard trial for Agatha ; but she had faithfully borne lesser burdens, and was so prepared bravely to carry this.

There are but few young men whom the knowledge of the possession of property does not, in some measure, injure. Our friend John was no exception to this rule. The fact that he had inherited from his father a comfortable fortune, made him extravagant. He had never before been thrown into the allurements of city life. John had a noble ambition to succeed ; but, alas ! he had now a very ignoble ambition to "cut a dash." He selected an expensive boarding-place, and soon arrayed himself in very fashionable attire. He had a fine watch : he bought now a fine chain, seals, a bosom-pin, and a heavy ring set with a large emerald. We blush to mention these things, lest people begin to

think John only a silly fop. It must be remembered that he was a very young man, and it is thus that the folly of young men exhibits itself. John had finished his course at college almost too soon: he was twenty when he obtained his A. B. It is a pity he had not been two or three years older, and then he might have had more mental and moral ballast, and been able to go more steadily under a full press of canvas. He had now spread wide the sails of money, genius, good looks, and flattery; and to other eyes than his own, he was staggering under them rather extensively. John liked to hire a horse for a drive now and then; he also enjoyed going to the opera or theatre: he despised cards; but he delighted in *recherche* suppers for three or four, and the bill from the restaurant was generally larger than the supper.

In all concourses of young men, there are

about two-thirds who know well how to turn the other third to account. John was one of the available minority who was to be “put through his paces” to the admiration of the crafty of the ring. John had money; he “was a rare good fellow at a supper:” he had wit and ability: therefore he was surrounded with plenty to help him spend his money, eat his suppers, and make their way by the aid of his wit. John was to buy plenty of books, books needed and not needed, and other young men were to be kind enough to borrow them; he was to diligently take down notes in lectures which absentees or inattentive hearers might copy at their ease, lying on John’s sofa, smoking John’s pipe, and drinking John’s wine.

Lester was in the city attending his second year’s lectures: he offered to find John a comfortable, home-like, reasonable boarding place; to introduce him to worthy students,

and indeed be generally, as in college, his useful friend.

John, however, did not care to have Lester for a Mentor ; he thought Lester might possibly be *slow* ; he reflected that he might be given to churches, mission schools, lectures, prayer-meetings, and the like,—places not fast enough for the scion of the house of Stafford.

Lester knew John's danger, saw also that he was not to be permitted to help him avoid them. The previous winter Lester had been through this mill. Lester was not rich, but he was manly, energetic, well-informed ; a man to make his way in the world ; and the cormorants of society had unsuccessfully tried to feed upon him. Lester knew what he was about ; he saw through hollow flatteries, flimsy schemes, and mock-friendships. Lester would have been worth more to John than all his other acquaintance put together ; but poor John did not see it.

One of the sad mistakes of this time was, that John went to more expense than he knew his guardian would countenance. Doctor Hathway was liberal: he made large allowance for John's free-heartedness; but he would not, to use John's phrase, "come down with the dust to the extent John did." John therefore went recklessly in debt, thinking that next year his funds would be all in his own keeping, and he could pay all arrears.

One praiseworthy part of John's career was that he never forgot for what end he had come to the city: he truly loved his chosen profession, and he studied with a zeal that recommended him to his instructors. Every opportunity for increasing his stock of medical lore was eagerly seized, and this eagerness was the fertile root of many opportunities. The learned men, with whom he came in contact, delighted in his acquisitiveness, honored him with their friendship, and in-

vited him to hospital consultations, and many places where other students were not to be seen. Still John had a serious drawback, patent to everybody,—his taste for strong drink. His friends remonstrated betimes. “John, this thing will ruin you,” said elder friends.

“John, boy,” cried now and then a cautious companion, “this whiskey ’ll floor you sometime. You’re studying for nothing if you keep on drinking. Some day you’ll be down where you can swap yourself for a sixpence, and nothing to boot.”

In very deed, John was already staggering under the weight of the demijohn he had made up his mind to carry ; he had burdened himself with a heavy burden, and he would not acknowledge it ; he would not drop it ; he got angry if any one mentioned it. John had early in life stopped growing, checked in his growth by demijohn ; but demijohn was growing into huge proportions day by day.

Spring came and the term was over, and John paid his board bill, and another bill or two out of what Doctor Hathway sent him, and then came home. His jeweler's bill, his wine bill, part of his tailor's bill, part of his book bill, part of his restaurant bill, and all his livery stable bill remained unsettled. John thought things would slip along quietly until next year — and then — ah, then plenty of money would line John's pocket.

But these creditors of John had sometimes lost money by young men ; they did not hold them worthy of implicit confidence, and John was followed by bills sent in for payment ; and, as he coolly paid no heed to them, he was favored with threatening letters and hints of legal process.

With these bills John dared not face Doctor Hathway ; he knew he should stand convicted a spendthrift ; and, if the matter was not hushed up, his affairs would be in every body's mouth ; and the highly respectable

people of his native town would consider that “John was going to the dogs ;” so John said to himself.

There was but one resource for John ; that was to appeal to Agatha’s goodness and wisdom. That he had grace enough to be ashamed to do. Agatha was daily spending her strength in nursing John’s self-ruined mother. Mrs. Stafford was now confined to her bed, a great sufferer, her mind in a very irritable, excitable state ; and Agatha had to bear patiently with fierce or piteous appeals for opium or brandy, or the most bitter and unjust reproaches.

John was also to add another grief to Agatha ; she was so generous and self-sacrificing that it was a shame, he told himself, to make exorbitant demands of her ; it should never happen again anyhow. Indeed, if she made him any advance, he would repay it very soon. Thus he reasoned with himself ; and

when he was driven to death by bills whose lengths ashamed himself, he at last went to his sister and made full confession. Agatha asked to see the bills.

Now there was one, for wines and liquors, which John greatly desired to keep back; but that creditor was the hardest of all; he would have his money now to the very last dime; and, as clear-headed Agatha was not to be cheated by roundabout statements, and would accept nothing but the bonafide bills themselves, John was obliged, burning with shame, to hand it over. Agatha looked surprise and reproach at that bill especially.

“I didn’t begin to use a tenth part of it myself, Aga,” pleaded John. “The fellows had it.”

“But was it right to supply the fellows with costly liquors, injurious to them, and for which you could not pay. Ought *I* to settle a wine bill for riotous young men?”

John hid his face and groaned.

“It’s beastly, Aga, I know it. I’m ashamed enough of it; it shan’t happen again. I only want a loan of you until next year. If I don’t pay this, I shall be blown on all over town.”

“If you live at this rate, John, your interest will barely support you, not pay any back debts.”

“Can’t you trust me?” asked John; bitterly. “You shall have it if I take it out of my capital.”

“I did not mean that,” said Agatha calmly. “what I do for you, dear John, I do freely; but I want you to consider, and not contract debts trusting to future income.”

“This is my most expensive year; another will be so very different,” said John. “I had everything to get. Now I’m provided.”

Agatha pondered some time, John pretending to read; at last the sister spoke: “I

can do this for you, John. I will tell you how. You know this is an expensive establishment for me to keep up; but I'd rather do it, than lose my old home and its customs. Mother's trustees pay something on her account, and Doctor Hathway insists on a payment too on yours, as you are here part of the time after all; the household uses up most of my income, and I have not on hand such a sum as you need, and I think it bad policy to draw on my capital."

"I don't want you to borrow," broke out John; "that would let the cat out of the bag at once."

"I shall not borrow. The carriage and horses are mine and I shall sell them. I do not need them, and have been thinking of letting them go, for, if Nick was relieved of the care of them, he could do all the gardening, and save me from hiring help there."

“ You’re very good, Agatha,” said John.

“ If I do this, I hope you will be more prudent in future, John.”

“ Oh, I shall, by all means. I had no idea how things ran up. You see the books cost a proper pile.”

“ Not more than the wines,” said Agatha, firmly. She thought it no duty to slur over John’s short-comings and misdemeanors. It was going to be a sacrifice on her part to pay this money for him, and she did not pretend that it was not; neither did she seem to begrudge it, for, as she told herself, whom else had she to care for but this same John. She heartily wished he were back to the age of petticoats, and riding on canes with rooster-feathers in his hat, so she might bring him up over again, and do it better.

Agatha sold her carriage and the sleek bays that had been at her service. People said she was a sensible girl, a real business

woman; it was much better for her to buy more railroad stock, than to keep that carriage and fat horses, which she seldom used. If it had been known that nearly all the prices of these possessions went to Philadelphia, to settle the bills of her thriftless brother, how many hands would have been lifted in dismay! As for John, he could not bear to pass the stable, and dreaded to look his sister in the eye; but, the matter once finished, Agatha was not one to bring it up again. She was so easy and so kind, showed so much respect for John's new fund of knowledge, and so much interest in his success, that, very unfortunately, John began to say to himself that "the little affair was not so bad after all." The summer was not a very lively one: John said he was too busy to take a pleasure trip, and did not want one if Agatha could not go with him. He felt that he owed it to her to stay at home and

cheer her as well as he could, while she was nursing his mother. Sometimes Mrs. Stafford rallied, and would sit up for a few days. Sometimes she would become gentle and reasonable, appear to be concerned about her spiritual danger, would be grateful to Agatha, anxious for the welfare of her son, and seem returning to her former self. Agatha and John made the best of these sunshine days ; they sung, had duets of piano and violin ; had walks to the coast or through the woods ; sometimes a ride on horseback ; and at evening, read aloud or played chess.

Sara was an excellent nurse, and, when Mrs. Stafford was in a good mood, she was willing to be waited on by her ; but at other times, Agatha was the only one who could satisfy her querulous demands, or hush her weary moans. Despite Agatha's early assertions that she would have nothing to do with

music, she had returned to it, for the gratification of her friends, and was now thankful that she had done so, as John was fond of music; and often Mrs. Stafford seemed like King Saul, possessed of an evil spirit that would not be calmed, unless Agatha became her David, to soothe her with a psalm.

In the fall, John departed for the city, promising Agatha that he would improve on last year's doings, and cut some of his frolicking companions. He really meant to do this, but good intentions are but feeble in a partner of Demijohn; and, while John's strength was invested in carrying successfully this poisonous ally he had chosen, he had little ability to live up to rigid rules of economy and sober friendship.

"You will send for me if mother gets worse," John had said, as he parted from Agatha at the depot. His sister had ventured to leave her mother long enough to

make one or two calls with John, and see him started on his journey.

"I feel encouraged about mother," said Agatha. "She does not suffer as much, and seems much better in her mind."

"She'll never get better, Agatha; she cannot live much longer," said John.

"I know that; but, if her mind is quiet, if I might see her repent and prepare to die, you cannot tell what a load would be off my heart," said Agatha.

"Yes, yes, I understand," said John, hastily.

Now, soon after Agatha had left home, that ne'er-do-weel Uncle Jerry had unexpectedly gone to see his niece, Fanny. Sara had been ready to deny him admission; but Uncle Jerry grew loud, and said he had a right to make a call. Nick was away, and Sara concluded the guest must stop until Miss Agatha came. Uncle Jerry behaved very

well — was kind, quiet, and entertaining — and Sara, thrown off her guard, went down stairs to prepare some medicine and her patient's lunch. No sooner had she departed than Uncle Jerry pulled out a flask of brandy, got two tumblers, some sugar and a spoon from the table, and proposed to Mrs. Stafford "to drink to her better health."

"It will set you right up," said the old fiend.

The love of drink awoke in Mrs. Stafford like a demon. She drank what he offered and greedily demanded more. More she had ; and when the dismayed Sara returned, she saw that the cares of months had been frustrated. She called Nick, who was now in the garden, to "take the old villain to the poor-house."

Nick, full of indignation, was not disposed to treat Uncle Jerry gingerly. He pulled him into the yard, and bade him mount a

lumber wagon which was near the gate, in which he could be conveyed to his home. Uncle Jerry was drunk and fractious. He would not get in, and, tumbled in, would not stay there. Nick then took stout straps, and, fastening his feet and hands securely, laid him on a truss of hay, and ingloriously was Uncle Jerry carried from the scene of his wickedness, just before Agatha came home, to be, by this new disaster, well-nigh discomfitted. From that ill-starred hour, Mrs. Stafford's day sunk rapidly down unto its night. Enshrouded in heavy clouds, dipped a life that, until almost at its meridian, had been bright and fair.

Her death came suddenly, even after such long expectation. John was sent for, but did not reach home until his mother was in her coffin. After he had been in the house a little while, Agatha went with him to look at the dead face once so dear. Some-

thing of its earlier purity, fairness and sweetness had come back, as they stood there. The dignity of death, the mute appeal of that deep, mornless sleeping, touched John keenly, and he wept. It was an auspicious moment. "John," said Agatha, "you made me a promise over our father's coffin which I fear you are not keeping; your mother's death has stirred bitter fears within me for you. Shall I ever stand and look on your life, cut short by intemperance; your genius and your industry blighted by strong drink?"

"No, you shall not!" cried John, much softened. "Here, Agatha, over this dead hand, I make you a solemn vow not to go the drunkard's way. I will be worthy of your goodness, worthy of my father's name, worthy of myself!"

"God grant it," said Agatha. "To seal your promise, look up to God; only by his good help can you be made to stand." But to

this gentle admonition, John could utter no amen.

For the time, Agatha was comforted. Every death leaves a void. Mrs. Stafford was missed, truly ; but it is a sad pity for one so to live and die that their dying shall be the uplifting of a heavy load from patient hearts.

John went back to the city, somewhat sobered, a little fearful of himself, laden with a good resolve or two. Before Spring, he was twenty-one, and his own master. He got his fortune, and some good advice. This last he flung to the winds, and before the end of his third year of medical study he seemed likely to fling his fortune to the winds, also. He got his M. D. So far, so good ; but despite his vow, he was still staggering under a weight of Demijohn.

CHAPTER VI.

As much Demijohn as John can carry.





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EADY now to enter upon the practice of his profession, John was offered a partnership with Doctor Hathway. This he declined.

“I wish to improve myself in surgery and

in difficult practice,” said John, “and I shall

get into a hospital for a year. I can afford it, and I am young enough yet."

Agatha was pleased with this decision: she had feared John would go to Paris, and she felt sure he would fall into dissipation in that gay capital, and perhaps never return to his native land. She had made up her mind that when John got fixed somewhere for the winter she would go and board near him; she kept her own counsel though, for she thought John would think she was suspicious of him and felt as if he needed watching. Part of the summer was spent in an excursion to Mackinaw, and early in autumn John obtained a position in a hospital, and at once left home. Agatha, having set her affairs in order, and closed her home for the winter, wrote John to meet her on a certain day.

"I'm so surprised at your coming, Agatha," said John. It was evident he was not as

much pleased as surprised. "I have been kept such a prisoner at home," she replied cheerfully, "that I need a winter's relaxation; and of course this city offers many attractions to me aside from your being here."

John was boarding at a hotel. He said it was more "convenient," — for convenient we may read "stylish."

Agatha said she would like the hotel very well, and thither John took her. He was very proud of his sister; he knew she would be a great assistance in introducing him to good society, but he felt that she would see in him many things worthy of condemnation. There were now times when John would drink so much as to disturb his brain. He would not be rude or noisy, but he would forget his duty, and was at the mercy of any evil counsellor who might choose to take advantage of him. He did not indulge in this way very frequently, and never early

in the day ; yet his habits were known, and he was once or twice roundly reprimanded by those in authority. John had now just as much Demijohn as he could carry ; a little more and he would be a confirmed, hopeless, disgraced drunkard. It was utterly impossible for him to make any advance in honor or in learning ; all he could do was to hold his own. If he had let the Demijohn go now,— but he told himself he could not. He had not lost his ambition, but had some vain idea of succeeding, demijohn and all. Just here his old college acquaintance, Joe, came to the hospital for treatment for a few weeks. He was engaged in business in the city, and being laid up with a sprained limb, came as a private patient to the hospital. John, of course, saw him, and they at once renewed their intimacy. They drank together sometimes, and drinking now unloosed John's tongue, and

set him to talking, when he had much better have been silent. Joe was a crafty, dishonest fellow ; he told one of his boon companions in the city, that "Doctor John was a goose, just ready for plucking."

From John, Joe learned a great deal about the internal arrangements of the hospital, found out where some valuable stores were kept, and then resolved to obtain the keys which were sometimes in John's possession, and carry off some of these costly drugs, whereof a moderate bulk might represent what was to Joe a sum of money worth trying for. Joe being convalescent, and about to leave the hospital, managed to be out one evening with John, and got him intoxicated. He had bribed a porter to aid him, and when they got back to the hospital, Joe got from John the needed keys, and then by aid of the porter, removed as much as he dared, and had a companion ready to dispose of it.

Next morning John awoke sober, to find himself in Joe's room and burdened with a memory that Joe had had his keys.

"Hello, old boy!" cried the cheery Joe, "here you are — Richard's himself again."

"I say Joe, where are my keys?" cried John.

"There on the stand."

"What did you want them for? No mischief now, Joe."

"None, upon my soul. I wanted to see if one of the little ones would unlock my confounded trunk. Come, John, turn out and polish yourself up and step after a glass of soda water. If any one notices you staid, it can be that I had a racking headache and wanted you on hand."

John explained to Agatha that "they had had a very difficult case on hand, and he stayed to watch symptoms."

Agatha doubted him; she noticed his restless eye and flushed cheek.

When the loss of stores was discovered, John was sure at once where they had gone, but dared not say a word ; he felt very unhappy, and his sister saw his gloom, but could not bring him to confide in her.

Yet another trouble grew out of John's infidelity. The porter who had aided Joe, concluded that the young surgeon should be to him as a gold mine, to work upon occasion. He cautiously betrayed to John his knowledge of the affair.

“ You let him have your keys, doctor,” he said — by no means adding the information that he himself had aided in the robbery. “ I seed it all. I oughtn’t a kep my muzzle shut, but I’m a poor man, doctor, and I didn’t like to ruin a young gentleman like you, doctor, by ‘peachin’ on him. No, I didn’t.”

“ Thank you, Randall,” said John, ready to drop with distress and shame.

“ Howsom’ever, sir, I don’t know but I

ought to let out. It lies on my conscience, it do, and I'm a poor man."

"Randall, what shall I give you to keep you quiet?" asked John, desperately.

"Well," drawled Randall, "I don't hush up for money; but seeing you want me to keep quiet I will, and as I'm a poor man you might hand me over five dollars this time, doctor."

John gave the sum required. How he felt! What an agony of remorse he endured! His self-respect was gone; he was at the mercy of a low scoundrel, and he dared not confess the whole transaction, for fear of the public disgrace it would bring upon him.

When Randall wanted money after that, he would only say, slyly, "Doctor, have you five dollars, or ten dollars, or sometimes he would go as high as twenty dollars, for a poor man, this morning? The oftener John paid this hush money, the meaner he felt; and the

less ready also to have the miserable affair divulged.

In the summer, Agatha went home, and in September John went to visit her. He looked haggard and unhappy. The time was expired which he expected to spend at the hospital ; but he could retain his position there if he chose, and he seemed inclined to do so, He was not improving much, he drank too freely for mental improvement ; the position was nothing in a pecuniary point of view. Agatha urged him to settle himself somewhere ; but the springs of action seemed forever gone. John was apathetic : he could not strike boldly for anything ; he could hardly hold his own, to say nothing of an advance. Indeed, he believed at times he was slowly retrograding. To Agatha's remarks about settling himself, he replied, indifferently, —

“ I guess I'll stay where I am another year,

Agatha. I can support myself, and I'm young enough yet."

"You are just living on your income, and making no improvement in brains or purse," cried Agatha the energetic. "Rouse up and do something, John. Where is your ambition?"

"Asleep, I guess," said John, moodily. "I don't feel like looking for anything now; perhaps I will next year."

"If you go back there, I shall too," said Agatha, decidedly.

"Well," said John, carelessly.

"Doctor Hathway will take you partner yet?"

"I won't be tied to that old grannie doctor; he's fifty years behind the age," cried John.

John returned from his vacation to the hospital, and Randall ever and again fixed himself to him like a leech, and sucked his

fill. John had now, in small instalments, paid the insatiable porter two hundred dollars, — the value, indeed, of the property abstracted from the hospital. He had grown angry, and had said, at the last advance, Randall must come no more. Randall replied, —

“ It goes agin me to go for harming a young gent like you, doctor. I’m a poor man ; if you tells me I can’t come again, why likewise I can’t ; but I must say, doctor, this affair of yourn hurts my feelin’s a good deal, it do.”

By Christmas, Randall came again. John was in his room at the hotel, next to Agatha’s ; Randall was shown up there, by some misunderstanding ; John had been drinking, and was cross. He stormed at Randall ; Randall persisted, saying, “ he was a poor man, and must go to the head doctor and tell the truth. Ten dollars wer’n’t much for a gentleman who wanted things kep’ mum, it wer’n’t.”

Finally John flung a bill at him, saying, “Take it, you greedy carrion ; it is the last ten dollars I have in my purse.”

Now Randall dared not tell of John’s defection, as his own share had been great ; but this, John — his mind fretted and weakened by liquor — did not know. Randall pocketed the money and the bad names, and went his way. John hid his face and groaned. Agatha had heard part of this dispute, especially John’s last words. She looked from her door, and saw a very coarse, evil-looking man going down-stairs. Then she went into her brother’s room, and sat down by his bed. “John, I’ve known, this long while, that something was wrong with you ; and now I want you to tell me the truth. I shall always stand by you, John, and help you. What hold over you has that low fellow that was in here ? Why must you give him money against your will ?”

John hesitated a little; then told her the whole of the disgraceful story.

“But the theft, John, was Joe’s, not yours; and I dare say this rascal helped him.”

“Maybe so,” said John; “but don’t you see I betrayed a trust? I am really responsible for this loss, and, moreover, if the thing is brought to light, and Joe is sought for, my part in it will be bruited all over town, and I shall be declared a drunkard in whom no confidence may be placed.” John seemed nearly distracted.

“And how much have you paid this fellow?”

“Two hundred and ten dollars. More than the loss was, I believe.”

“And do you mean to live at the mercy of a low creature, who will, after he has lived on your money, surely betray you at last?”

“What can I do?” asked poor John.

“You can lay the whole matter before the

surgeon in charge, or the Superintendent, or whoever the proper person is."

"It is the surgeon; but I can't do it, Agatha."

"You must: better to confess yourself, than be miserably accused by that scoundrel."

"I believe I'll kill myself," groaned John. "I would if I dared."

"That would be the most ruinous thing you could do. Write, at once, a plain statement of facts."

"Then I would have to send the amount lost, and, Agatha, I've lived expensively, and I've paid two hundred and ten to this villain, and I've lent some, for the wretch borrowed fifty of me" —

"When you were not yourself," suggested Agatha.

"Yes — I do everything wrong then — and I'm cleaned out entirely."

“ If you’ll write the confession, I’ll get you the money,” said Agatha. “ My income is more than yours,” she added, kindly, which was true, as she had property from her own mother.

John now set himself to write what Agatha desired ; but his hand trembled, his brain was confused, and his shame and sorrow so great, that, after spoiling several sheets of cap, he flung himself down, crying he could not do it. Then the ever-enduring Agatha came to the rescue.

“ I’ll write it all out fairly, John, and read it to you, and you have only to sign your name. You’ll resign your place, of course.”

“ Yes, but I’m afraid you’ll draw it too soft on me, and that would look mean.”

“ I won’t,” said Agatha ; I’ll write as in your place.”

She wrote the document, a fair, straightforward statement, enclosed the check, John

signed the confession, and it was sent to the proper authority.

“We might as well go home,” said John, sadly, “all is up with me now.”

When the paper from the delinquent John was received, it was well understood who had written that honest, clear, elegantly worded and penned statement. Agatha Stafford was known only to be admired and respected, and before she had completed her preparations for leaving the city, the surgeon-in-chief called upon her. “Those miscreants, Joe Harper and Randall, should be brought to punishment,” he said.

“To do so would only still more expose and disgrace my brother,” said Agatha, with crimsoning cheeks.

“We can let it pass quietly. Randall shall be dismissed without a recommendation, Miss Stafford. We sympathize with you, and hope for your brother’s reform.

He is young ; he surely cannot continue to distress such a sister."

The surgeon had also a long private conference with John, and then Agatha and her brother left the city, where John had failed so lamentably, and returned to their long deserted home. The place looked itself when blazing fires and shining lamps lit up the rooms. The old servants were in their places, the family china and silver were brought out, and the house plants bloomed in their sunny windows.

Agatha had carefully concealed her brother's errors from people in her native place. John was popular and respected. After they had been back a short time, Agatha resolved to spur up her brother, if possible, to new exertions.

"Get to work, John ; let by-gones be by-gones. Go on to a better life."

"Agatha," said John, "I don't believe

there's any use trying. I'm doomed. This love of liquor is an inherited taste. I got it from my mother, I'm convinced. I have always craved it, and I know I always will. There's no help for it."

"Don't say so, don't feel so, John ; you *can* reform ; sign a pledge ; be your own man."

"That is what I can't do. A pledge wouldn't help me ; if I can't reform without it, I can't with it. I believe I'm a gone case. I wish I were dead, so as not to worry you any more."

"John, you'll break my heart!" cried Agatha. "I *cannot* see you go to ruin. You must come up to a better life. Begin at the root of the matter, John. Get the grace of God to help you. Make new resolves, John ; live here at home where there are less temptations than in the city. Doctor Hathway will be glad of your help yet. People like

you, are proud of you, know nothing against you. Come, John, let me say to you like Eli,— Put away thy wine from thee and then go on to better things."

"I'll do it if I can" said John, moodily.

When Doctor Hathway came to call, John fled up to his room.

"John is not feeling very well," said Agatha to their guest, and it was true.

"He's studied too hard" said the doctor ; but Agatha could not assent to this.

"I want him to live here. I like no place so well, and I do not like to be separated from him. Do you wish him for a partner yet, doctor?"

"Be sure I do, said the Doctor, "glad to get him."

"He'll come see you soon about it, I hope," said Agatha.

"There's an old friend of yours, just dead, Miss Agatha ; died of delirium tremens, com-

plete wreck ; Ralph Curtis, you know. A happy thing you did not marry him. I thought you would, one time."

"I could never marry any but a sound temperance man, I had seen so much from drinking," said Agatha.

"And there's your Uncle Jerry, laid up with pneumonia ; got it just in his drunken way. What does he do, one snowy night, a week ago, but turn out, drunk as a piper, barefooted, in light marching order, and go to digging in the snow. "Hallo, what's up, Uncle Jerry," says some one, running after him, and the old idiot said he was looking for a head of lettuce to make a salad. He's booked for dying, this time, sure."

Agatha thought of the declaration of Scripture, "Their wine is the poison of dragons, and the cruel poison of asps."

"I'm right downcast about Ralph Curtis," said the good old doctor. "He was as fine

a young man as one could wish to see; a very model of form and feature, bright, kind. I tell you, Miss Agatha, when I looked at him, lying dead there, in the very midst of his years, I could only take up the lamentation of Isaiah, ‘ Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim, whose glorious beauty is as a fading flower; but they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way. They err in wisdom, they stumble in judgment.’ ”

John formed a partnership with Doctor Hathway. His pride was much broken; but the respect with which he was treated, the fact of having something to do, and the sneers he began to meet, roused him to new energy. He began to do better. Agatha and the Doctor were as towers of strength to him, and the summer unfolded in promise and the autumn came without storms; so Agatha, a true child of hope, took courage and looked on to happy years.

There was one time when some young fellows wished to form a club, and asked John to join them. He mentioned it to Agatha: he told her everything now.

“A club!” cried Agatha. “It is so singular that, after the miserable fate of the first club, any others should have been organized.”

“What club was that?” asked John.

“One formed about the year of the world 2050.”

“Possible!” cried John. “Well, Aga, you are better read in history than I am, and you’ll have to tell me about it. I don’t think I ever heard it!”

“It was a club formed expressly for eating, drinking, and having a good time. The members were ten,—seven men and three women. Very exclusive they were, all belonging to one rich family. While they were feasting,—and, it is expressly mentioned,

drinking wine,—‘there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house.’ It fell in a moment, killing every member of this jolly club. Some bystanders saw the accident, and told the tale.”

“Psha!” said John, innocently; “I don’t believe it is authentic! Where did you ever grub up such a piece of old-world lore as that?”

“From a very ancient and reliable book, once written by different learned men, on rolls of parchment, in Hebrew character. You will find the account in the first chapter of the Book of Job, in our Bible.”

John laughed loudly. “Taken in, for once, upon my word. Who but you, Aga, would have set forth Job’s convivial sons and daughters as a club!”

“Anyway, John, I think joining a club would be a great temptation to you,—one you might not be able to withstand.”

“Pooh!” said John, impatiently; “but a body must have a little recreation, and the club would be of our best fellows.”

“You can tell them that a physician’s time is not his own. You must be in readiness for the calls of your patients. You know, John, you ought to go to the sick with a clear head and a firm hand; and that, if you had been taking wine in your club, perhaps you could not do. I have been thinking that it is rather dull, and have had an idea of starting a “Conversational” of a few friends, to meet from house to house, for reading, music, conversation, and perhaps we might admit chess-playing. Speak of it to some of your friends, and I will mention the matter to Faith Temple.”

“Faith Temple is the prettiest girl in this town,” said John, quickly.

“So she is,” said Agatha; “what do you say to my plan?”

“I’ll go in for it,” said John.

“And drop the club?”

“Yes; drop the club.”

So Agatha formed what she called her Conversational, about a dozen young people uniting in it; and they met in rotation, one evening each week, at their houses; the refreshments were fruits, cake, coffee or lemonade, no wine or alcoholic drinks being permitted. John thought it better than a club would have been.

When the winter came, with cold winds and heaped-up snows, John yielded to another form of temptation. Doctor Hathway gave John all the evening and night calls, and all those to a distant part of the country, on the plea of the younger partner being best able to endure fatigue or exposure.

Going out thus for long rides in the cold or storm, shrinking from sleet and sharp winds after the warmth and comfort of his

home, John would stop by the saloon or hotel and call for a hot sling or punch "to warm and strengthen him." Such tampering with his appetite was fatal: in less than three months he was drinking harder than ever. In spite of Agatha's prayers, in spite of Doctor Hathway's remonstrances, and the reproving looks of friends, John was going to ruin with headlong speed.

Agatha's daily terror was lest he should, while intoxicated, make some horrible mistake in his profession. How many schemes she tried to send him sober, at least, on his daily rounds, and, if he must drink; to have him do it at home where the life of others would not be endangered by it!

How often, when some messenger would come to the door, desiring the presence of Dr. Stafford, when Agatha knew he was too drunk to understand what he was about, did she tell them he was not well or was busy,

and send them for Dr. Hathway. She did not believe in the conventional “not at home” when it could only be a lie; but she would say he was not well when she blushed to feel that drunkenness only had made him ailing, or that he was occupied when his occupation was drinking. Such doleful days as she had passed with her mother were coming back again.

One March afternoon, Agatha met John coming from the house of a barber, where a child lay sick of scarlet fever. She saw that he was entirely incapable of proper treatment of a patient, and she trembled for what his prescription might have been. She went at once into the house, entered the sick-room, sympathized with the mother, inquired into all the patient’s symptoms, and made herself very agreeable.

“The doctor’s just given me a powder for the child,” said the mother; “you see it is

on the table. I'm to give it soon. It's a big one: ain't it? How would you give it?"

"In some preserves," said Agatha, examining the portion with apparent carelessness. To her horror she found it was morphine enough to kill the invalid.

"I'll go for the preserves," said the mother, "and give it right off." While she was gone, Agatha hid the powder in her pocket.

When the woman came back, she looked in vain for the medicine. Agatha, blushing for her part in the business, helped her.

"I must have carried it down-stairs," said the woman.

"It isn't there," she said, after a search below; and again she searched the bedroom, Agatha helping her.

"Don't look any more," said Agatha. "I'll run out and get the medicine again in five minutes, either from brother or Doctor Hathaway."

"How good you are!" said the woman.

Agatha went to Doctor Hathway, gave the symptoms of the sick child, and asked for medicine.

"John's attending there," said the doctor.

"But he's gone off, and she can't find the powder he left," said Agatha. "She's dreadfully frightened."

"Here then," said the doctor, "take that along; and if it isn't what John gave, he may thank you for my interference."

Early next morning, when John was quite sober, Agatha gave him the powder, saying, "John, what is that?"

"Morphine!" said John, promptly.

"May I take it to-night? I don't sleep very well?"

"Are you crazy? It would kill you," said John.

"Pooh, John; that's a dose for a child six years old."

“A child! Agatha, a child that took that powder would almost certainly die, certainly unless remedies were promptly given.”

“John Stafford,” said Agatha, solemnly, standing before him, and fixing her flashing eyes keenly upon him,—“yesterday noon you gave that powder to little Lucy Horne !”

“Impossible !” cried John.

“You did. I saw you coming out of there—drunk, John; and I went in, and thank God I remedied your mistake. It is no thanks to you, John, that that child is not lying dead this morning.” She then told him how she had managed. I have saved your credit and the child’s life; but you cannot expect me always to be at hand. John, John, what is to become of you !” John sat down, hid his face in his hands and groaned aloud.

It was a bitter lesson, and he profited by

it, even beyond his sister's expectations; he drank no more for several months. His friends began to be encouraged about him.

His next lesson came in another way. During the heats of summer, he fell to taking iced champagne and iced sherry. Whenever John yielded at all, he yielded much; his craving once indulged got entirely the better of him, and it was only from summers heat until autumns frosts that iced champagne and sherry were exchanged for enough brandy or whiskey to make him drunk again and again, and make him the subject of sharp remarks.

He had gone to the barber's one day, and was sitting behind a curtain, out of sight of those in the front of the shop, when some gentlemen came in, and one presently said to another, "John Stafford is drinking again. Poor business that for a Doctor. I wouldn't trust him."

“It is a taste he inherits,” said another. “You know how his mother went; he will follow in her way; I doubt if he could stop drinking if he tried.”

“He be a very good doctor,” put in the barber. “His liquor don’t touch his doctoring at all. I’d sooner trust him nor anybody. Last winter my little Lucy had the scarlet fever bad, and Doctor Stafford cured her most wonderful, and he was drinking then as much as he do now. Doctor Stafford for me, gentlemen, drunk or sober.”

John heard all. He thought how nearly the barber’s Lucy had died under his hands, how only Agatha, watchful and ready sister, had saved her. He stole quietly out at the back door, left the shop unseen and hastened home. They had said he was going his mother’s way; that his ruin was near; that he could not do better if he would. He felt humbled to the dust.

“Rise above it, John,” said Agatha, once more made the confidant of her brother’s trials. I do not believe you are doomed to die of intemperance against your will. Years ago you could and should have made a firm stand. It would have been sure and easy then; it is hard but possible now. But of this evil, John, strike at the roots. Spend no more time hewing down its upper growth; go down to the depths of your un-renewed nature, confess your sins to God, seek his pardon, his help. By that, the most fallen wretch that ever lived can rise toward Heaven.”

John wanted now to be a sober man. He truly deplored his drunkenness; but he did not mourn that he was a sinner, astray from God. He had no longings to go to his Father’s feet for forgiveness. He hardened his heart, and would not pray. He did not open his Bible, he seldom went to

the house of God ; but spent his Sabbaths visiting his patients, and reading medical works, or the newspapers. He attempted again to reform. He gave up his cups, and, by a strong effort, abstained from drinking for some little time ; but again he fell. He fell, became so drunken that Doctor Hathaway regretted having ever formed a partnership with him, and even Agatha entirely despaired. At this time, he was called to see the wife of a rich and hot-tempered farmer, some distance from the town. The woman was lying very ill. John went there, drunk ; so drunk that he gave the wrong medicine, and the patient grew rapidly worse. The attendants began to whisper that “the doctor had not known what he was about,” and the husband, in high excitement, went for Doctor Hathaway. At the patient’s bedside, and shown what potions she was taking, the distressed old doctor could not deny that

an almost fatal line of treatment had been adopted. The rumor crept abroad ; was on every one's tongue. People said, " Doctor Stafford had as good as killed Mrs. Jenkins ;" and John, conscience-stricken and despairing, was ashamed to leave his house. Farmer Jenkins was in paroxysms of fear and rage. He rushed into John's house, one morning, and, striding up to the unfortunate young man, who was sitting drearily at breakfast, with his sister, he shook his fist in his face, crying, " If my wife dies by your means, you villain, I'll have the last jot and tittle of the law on you, you murderous, drunken sot ! "

John could not answer a word ; but Agatha, rising, said, calmly, " Mr. Jenkins, however great my brother's error and your distress, you have no right to enter my house in this violent manner, and use insulting language in my presence. I am surprised that you

have no more respect for a woman, and that you forget that Stafford Place is my private property, and that you cannot bring your quarrels here. I am deeply distressed about your wife, so is my brother."

"So he ought to be," said Mr. Jenkins, dropping his head, much confounded by Agatha's firm rebuke. "I don't mean to trespass on you, Miss Stafford; I have no call to do it. But you'll own it's hard on me, this way my wife's been used with wrong medicines."

"That is true, and it is my daily prayer that she may recover, both for your sake and ours."

"And then, Miss Stafford, even if she does, just look at the way my house has been thrown helter skelter by being all this while without a mistress, and the sum of money I'm laying out for doctors and nurses and help."

“Whatever expenses have, in Doctor Hathway’s opinion, been incurred through my brother’s error,” said Agatha, “we shall most readily repay.”

The rough, hasty man withdrew, no less angry at John ; but ashamed of himself, and much awed by “that Miss Stafford, who was every bit as grand as Queen Victory,” he told his hired man, as they sat, that evening, by the kitchen fire-place, making brooms.

Mrs. Jenkins slowly recovered. Agatha sent the farmer a check for one hundred dollars, which he declared again to his hired man, “was very handsome treatment, good enough for Queen Victory.”

Mrs. Jenkins had recovered ; but John’s prestige as a physician was gone. People distrusted him ; his help to Doctor Hathway was now given in the office almost entirely,—making out bills, reading upon cases, and so on : but the shock of his mistake, and its

consequences had sobered him for a time. Dram-shops saw him no more; the demijohn was empty and dusty; John's breath was untainted by liquor; his eye was clear, his hand was steady; and kind people— they are plentier than we are apt to think— began to say, “That affair at Jenkins's has been the making of Doctor Stafford;” friends once more gathered about him; he was called here and there, and, at length, seemed floating on to popularity and good practice once more. To change the metaphor, poor John was building the new house of his goodness on the shifting sands of his own ability: let a storm of temptation come, and it would be gone.

John's temptations generally had come from his own deceitful heart; from that heart they again proceeded: his craving for strong drink came back; he thought himself firm now, he could indulge a little, and still keep within the bounds of prudence. He had said

so often before, yet every time proved himself wrong. The demijohn again saw the light, and was filled at a distant town ; no one of his neighbors should know what he was doing : “ they would talk, and their talk would drive him to distraction ; ” the demijohn should be locked in his closet, should only at suitable times “ minister to his need. He wanted something to stimulate his brain for study ; something to keep him up for long night rides, and busy days.”

Thus said John ; and how true an answer might he find in the words of Scripture : “ Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging ; whoso is deceived thereby is not wise.”

John was most wofully deceived by that wicked spirit of the demijohn, luring him on to take that little, which should grow unto great ruin. The spirit of the demijohn is like the Afrite of Eastern story, which can be corked up in a bottle ; but break the potent

seal that holds him in, and lo ! he spreads from east to west, and towers to the clouds, and seizes the puny manikin that set him free, and carries him whither he will. Let us read it as a parable of the rash man who lets loose upon himself the awful spirit of strong drink; keep over the Afrite of the demijohn the potent seal of Solomon,—wisdom to shut it in unseen, untouched forever.

This wisdom had not John. His life, now since he had finished his attendance on medical lectures, had not been of improvement and honorable advance, but a mighty struggle to keep himself and the demijohn in one place. He fell, he retrieved himself, he fell again, he learned nothing new, and was ever on the eve of having what he had learned washed out of his mind by the use of intoxicating liquors. He had gone on, from the first childish taste of the demijohn's dark glass rim, to toil and stagger under the self-imposed weight.

CHAPTER VII.

John becomes one-half a John.





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John becomes one-half a John.



P

ENDING John's efforts at reforming, in his own strength, and the beginning of a new lapse into drunkenness, Agatha, a gracious "queen of society" in her

native town, was keeping him, by her potent

influence, still in a reputable circle of society, and holding his friends about him. People knew well that Agatha and John stood or fell together, in the social scale ; and, if they dropped John, they could no more have the good company of Agatha. Upheld thus by his sister, John saw much of that “ prettiest girl in town,” Faith Temple. Now, when Agatha saw John constantly seeking Faith, and Faith in no wise refusing his attentions, she began to consult with herself, “ whereunto these things would grow.”

Agatha was ready to seize any lawful means for John’s reformation. She thought he was now doing very well, and that the society and affection of such a girl as Faith might be powerful to hold him to the right. On the other hand, if John fell away to drunkenness, Faith would be sacrificed ; and Agatha remembered that she had not been willing to marry Ralph Curtis on the poor hope of

his becoming a sober man, and that Ralph's future course had fully justified her decision. Agatha loved her brother more than herself; but she loved Faith, as the Bible bade her, *as herself*, and she felt that for Faith she should desire such course as she had taken for herself. She therefore watched John more closely than before, knowing that if he were deviating from a right line of conduct she should soon discover it. About this time John had brought home the demijohn full of whiskey, and locked it up in his closet. As ever, if he had one interview per diem with the demijohn, he soon wanted half-a-dozen more, and before long, Agatha saw what he was doing. One evening, just when this dire discovery was coming to crush the hope of better things, John came down stairs in his best array, evidently going out. It was a clear, chilly, fall evening; Agatha was sitting by the glowing grate, a

book on the table by her side, ivory needles in her hand, and the gorgeous wools for an afghan lying in her lap.

“Aga,” said John, putting his head in the door, “I’m going out for a while.”

“Are you going to see Faith?” asked Agatha, her eyes on her work.

“Yes,” said John.

“Come here a minute, John; I want to speak with you.”

John came and stood with his hands on the back of a chair, saying “Well?” impatiently.

“John,” said Agatha, gently, “it hurts me to say it; but I think you are drinking again.”

John was silent: he would not tell a lie.

“John, you ought either to give up liquor, or—Faith Temple.”

“If any thing would help me to give it up, it would be Faith Temple,” said John.

“Then give it up forever, for her sake, and wait long enough to be sure you are reformed, before you visit her, or engage her feelings in your behalf. That is your only honorable course,—the only course safe for her; for here you are going back to drinking just while you are pursuing your acquaintance with her.”

“I can’t give it up so,” said John. “I’ve tried and I can’t. You don’t know how I am pressed and possessed by this thing, Agatha.”

“Then, John, you must never marry.”

“There’s one thing, Agatha,” said John; “I should never be ugly and rude while I was drunk, and I never could reduce my wife to poverty as some drunkards do.”

“John,” said Agatha, “let us talk plainly. You would not reduce your wife to poverty because I have money to come between you and that; your own money is melting away,

and will go faster and faster. You know, John, I would not begrudge you every penny I have if it would do you any good. As to being cross, John, mother was never violent when she was intoxicated, nor could she bring me to poverty ; but was my life with her these years a happy one ? ”

John shook his head.

“ And, John, it was unhappy because I loved her, because it cut me to the heart to see the wreck she had become. If the love had been dearer, the greater would have been my trouble. John, would you want to doom Faith Temple to such a care as mine has been ? ”

“ I shall not do as mother did,” said John. “ I will not go back to what I was last year. I’ll be all right. I am now. Good night, Aga. Don’t you come between Faith and me ! ”

John’s elastic spirits had risen again.

Agatha thought the matter over many times after John had gone. She resolved to give Faith fair warning. To Agatha, nothing was more dreadful than being a drunkard's wife; she would not let Faith drift unadmonished on those shoals she herself had so narrowly escaped.

She invited Faith to walk with her one day, soon after that: they went toward the woods. The ground was strewn with rustling leaves; the frosts had dyed the trees; and the clinging vines, asters, and golden rods had lived their day; the lichens were in their glory, and vines of checkerberry and wintergreen wreathed among the mosses. The two girls were as Spring and Summer walking through the realm of Autumn; unseen between them a winter sorrow stalked. Thus were the four seasons represented, two in fair human forms, one in the natural, one in the spiritual world.

The two friends sat down on a great fallen tree, Faith twining her little hat with brilliant leaves and fantastic vines, and humming meanwhile a snatch of song, from the happiness of her heart; Agatha sat, her hands in her lap, in a perfect quiet which she could at will attain, and which had been much of a blessing to her in a life too often filled with excitement and cares. Sitting thus, she told Faith the story of Ralph Curtis, told it only as a prelude to a warning she must utter, and that Faith might know she spoke from experience.

“I have never regretted my decision, Faith!”

“No: of course you have not,” spoke Faith, earnestly. “I think there can be no worse lot than to marry a drunkard. It would break my heart. I am nearly frightened to death at drunken people.”

“Then,” said Agatha, turning away her

head, “you must never care anything for my brother John.”

Faith was mute for a little while, then said, “How can you speak so, Agatha?”

“I feel as if I must warn you, Faith. What burden I felt I could not myself carry through life, I would not let you, unwarned, assume. I verily believe, Faith, that I would lay down my life to secure John’s safety; but there is no more miserable delusion than to marry a man to reform him.”

“But, Agatha, John would never get *real* drunk; and he has reformed, and does not drink any more. I know it was very bad last fall, and people spoke so hard of him; he is sober now, and every one respects him. Not,” added the disingenuous Faith, “that I care anything for John, only as a friend, or a cousin you know; of course not.”

“Then,” said Agatha, “I hope you never

will ; for John *is* drinking again ; it almost breaks my heart to say it, and I know you will not hurt him by telling it. I talked to him lately about it. I love you, Faith. I wish my brother were worthy of you, and that you were willing to care for him" — thus Agatha outwardly accepted Faith's protest ; "but he is worthy of no good woman, until that complete reformation, for which I pray night and day, has come."

"What did he say when you accused him of drinking again ?" asked Faith, with an effort to appear careless.

"He said," replied Agatha, frankly, "that no one would be so able to make him what he ought to be, as you ; and I told him, that over that fallacy many a lovely woman's life had been wasted. No man has a right to ask a woman to marry him, to save him. He ought to try and be worthy of the woman he wants for a wife. I dare say he tells you

you are an angel, Faith. Does the foolish boy think any man is worthy of an angel's affection? much less, an intemperate man? Let him try to rise nearer that high plane, whereon he sets you, before he dares hope to bind his life and yours together."

We have said before that Agatha was a "strong-minded damsel;" she did not accept the tenet of feminine inferiority, nor did she think marriage was the chief end of woman; she believed that to fear God and keep his commandments, doing her share of the world's work, was the first duty of every woman, and that other things were to be taken as they were sent. You may say she could hold these theories very comfortably, intrenched behind an ample fortune; but if Agatha Stafford had earned by daily labor her daily bread, it would have been just the same. She walked quietly home with Faith; after they parted, John met his sister at their own gate.

“Agatha,” he asked as they walked up to the portico, “have you been talking to Faith about me?”

“I have said just about what I said to you the other night,” said Agatha, putting her hand through his arm; “for my part, John, I stand or fall in your fate; you are my one object in this world; as long as we two shall live, so nature ordains; but while I’m willing to give up all for you, no other woman shall do it blindly.”

After this Faith talked to John somewhat plainly, and when he protested that he meant to be sober, she asked him to take the pledge. There was a society of Good Templars in the town which John had been solicited to join, and this Faith thought he had better do. John would do much for Faith, so he joined the Templars. That was a happy day for Faith, and Agatha rejoiced and feared.

John “held fast his integrity” until nearly

Christmas, when he must needs go to the city to buy holiday gifts for Agatha and Faith. There he fell in with some who had been roystering college acquaintance ; his pledge was as the new ropes on Samson, and, when those Philistines—love of liquor and outside temptations—came upon him, he broke his pledge ; and, as if gathering momentum from his recent abstinence, he ran for a week a course of riot more miserable than he had known before.

Awaking from this extravagance, he returned home as much renewed as barber, hair-dresser and tailor would compass ; but Agatha read all the wretched story in his restless hands and eyes, his crimsoned cheeks, and his forced mirth. She looked him in the eye, a sad, loving, pitying look ; but said never a word. Miserable under a sense of his shameful fall, that evening he flung himself down on a low seat beside her, and, hiding

his face in one of her hands clasped in his own, he told his tale. “Agatha, Agatha, can’t you save me ?” he cried, pitifully.

In Agatha’s love for her so much younger brother, was a mingling of the mother and sister; she stroked his curly hair with her free hand, and tears ran down her cheeks. “Poor John, poor John!” she murmured; but she could not yield thus, long: she encouraged him to renewed effort, besought him to take courage, and to rise again above fortune; and long as the evening deepened, she talked to him of a changed heart, and the sustaining power of heavenly grace. Her words soothed and cheered him; but alas! that was all. They were as a sweet song by one who hath a very pleasant voice. John was ready to trust to himself, to the love of Agatha, to the influence of Faith Temple; but not to the Good Spirit of Truth, who will abide in human hearts, and mould them to his will.

Again a fall. The Good Templars learned that one of their number had been seen intoxicated on the streets. They cut him off; but John repented, Agatha pleaded, the society wanted to help him, and he was restored.

Now it was that Faith Temple, seeing John's weakness or wickedness, and knowing what for her was the one course of safety, withdrew herself from him, and one while, John would rush into excess, saying, "Faith's coldness made him reckless, and that he did not care to save himself;" and again he would take better thought, and would say "he would be worthy of respect and love, and Faith should see he was a man after all!"

People were again afraid to trust a drunken doctor. John had little to do, and idleness is a prolific mother of vice. When John came to that pass that he got drunk in the library at home, and Nick had to be summoned to take him up to his room, you may

be sure that Agatha's courage was all gone, and she felt as if the miserable times she had known with her step-mother had come back ; yes, even worse times, as John was dearer to her than Mrs. Stafford had been, and he was all that in this world she had left to love.

As John had little business, Agatha devoted most of her time to finding him occupation and amusement. She walked, she rode, she fished, she helped stuff birds and make collections of shells, she interested herself in all that John cared for — except the demijohn. They bought a telescope, and studied astronomy ; she had John read to her, and she read to him ; she got up puzzles, enigmas and conundrums, and often invited friends to their house, keeping strict guard over John that he would be in proper order to entertain them.

They went out but seldom, as John felt a backwardness about meeting those whom he

knew distrusted and condemned him. So persistent was he about Faith Temple, that Agatha, who thought she had now said to that point all that duty demanded, began to think that John was ordained to be as heavy a grief to Faith as to herself—until an event took place, which, while it greatly distressed both these young women, opened Faith's eyes clearly to John's vice.

They were all invited to a party at the house of an old acquaintance. Agatha would have preferred not to go; but Faith had consented to be escorted by John, and he would not remain at home. The evening bid fair to be a pleasant one; but who will excuse that host who had an ante-room near the supper-room, supplied with wines for the young men assembled as his guests? Supper was nearly over when Agatha heard of this provision of wine. She was in agony, and desired to go home; but John was not waiting upon her,

and Agatha must remain and endure. Soon poor John, lured by the voices of some children of the evil one, went into that den of iniquity, the wine-room.

Agatha asked their host to request John to come to her. John "was coming presently."

Agatha was attended that evening by a genial old bachelor, who, seeing after a time her anxiety, said he would "go bring John." John was not now to be brought. Faith, white and crimson by turns, was left to herself. "We must look after Faith," said Agatha; so the bachelor attendant did his best to take care of the two anxious young ladies.

The evening passed heavily. From the wine-room came ever and anon bursts of laughter or of song, jarring rudely on their feelings. John had several companions with him, and they were rapidly forgetting all propriety.

Agatha burned with indignation against the friends who had invited them; she knew they were aware of the weakness of these guests, and it seemed a diabolical thing to thus lay a snare in their path.

“Faith,” whispered Agatha, amid the music and merriment of lighter hearts, “I cannot endure this any longer. Mr. Benjamin will call the carriage, and take us both home. I shall send Nick to look after John.”

Faith gladly accepted this proposal, and soon the two were in the carriage leaving the scene of so much sorrow and mortification. They were silent until they reached Faith’s uncle’s, where she had her home. Agatha bent to kiss her as she said “good-night,” and felt tears on her cheek.

When left in the carriage with Mr. Benjamin, Agatha exclaimed, “I never should have gone there if I had imagined they would have wine. They are both members of the

church, and it seems incredible and horrible that they will, for the sake of a little more display and ostentation, set a snare for their neighbor's feet. I shall never go there again."

"It was a cruel thing," said Mr. Benjamin. "When I was a young man, I was nearly ruined by having my hostess at parties press drink upon me. Ladies make many drunkards, who will destroy the life and happiness of other women!"

Nick was despatched to the scene of the feasting, and, when John had drank enough to become passive, he took him home. Before long he was in a heavy slumber, and, hearing his deep breathing, Agatha, lamp in hand, entered his room and stood at the foot of his bed. Just so she had looked upon her mother's inebriate sleep.

Next day John locked himself in his room, would neither admit any one nor come out,

and also attempted to drown his sorrows in the demijohn. At last, when he was again stupid, Agatha had Nick burst the door open with his strong shoulder, settle John on his bed, and then carry off the demijohn, empty it, wash it, and replace it in the storeroom where John had first found it, when a little merry petticoated boy. Ah me! for the cane horse, the rooster plume, and the baby pomp of the little mock doctor! There lay John on his bed — drunk!!

When “John was himself again,” Agatha, by no look or word recalled the past; she felt as if her brother’s case was hopeless, and all that remained was for her to make the best of it.

A few days after all this had happened, John said, at dinner, “I suppose you know I’m finally exscinded as regards the Good Templars.”

“I suppose so,” said Agatha; “that is their duty you know.

“Yes, yes. The Templars are a good institution for some — no help to me. Nothing can help me. The love of strong drink was born in my blood ; it is an inherited taste, as much a disease as consumption or scrofula, and, upon my life, Agatha, it is a good deal worse.”

“It *is* worse, surely,” said Agatha.

“Yes,” broke forth John ; “better is an honorable grave than a disgraced life. I had rather die than be the man I am : but mere volition can neither kill, nor make alive !”

“However powerless you may think yourself now, John,” said his sister, “and however much you may say for inherited tastes and a craving that amounts to a desire, I know there was a time when you could have been your own master, when you could have taken and kept a pledge.”

“It is so indeed : when I was in school, or even when I was in college, I was at least even with the demijohn,” said John, bitterly ;

"now I am being slowly resolved into the demijohn. I am hardly half a man—the demijohn is the greater part."

What could Agatha say but, "Never despair, John; try once more;" and the old assurance, "I shall always stand by you, John."

That afternoon John folded his regalia in a neat, white box, and bade Nick take it to the lodge of Good Templars. That was the last of his connection with that body. The only trouble was that he had joined it too late.

John had not been near the office, had not dared to meet Doctor Hathway for some time, when the old gentleman came to the house one day, saying that there were some patients at the poor house he would like him to visit, Uncle Jerry being one.

John agreed to go, and it was tacitly understood between the Doctor and Agatha, that she should see that her brother gave

proper attention to these sick. Agatha was duly grateful to their old friend, but felt that it was only justice to him to have the partnership with John dissolved, for he was growing feeble enough to need an active and reliable assistant, which John would probably never be.

John having gone to the poor-house on his lively black pony, and being shown to Uncle Jerry's room, found that notable relative in bed, and not prepared to salute him very cordially. Between brandy and opium, Uncle Jerry was loud and rude.

“ Oh ho ! ” he cried, “ here is the drunken doctor ! You are not good enough for town gentry, but you come out to see poor-house folks ! Now you don't do any of your poisoning round me, neph. Every creature is good, and not to be despised ; likewise it ain't to be drunk always — not by doctors. I say, John, there's a verse in the

Bible you'd better learn with alterations :—
' It is not for *doctors*, Oh, *John*, it is not
for *doctors* to drink wine, nor for *physicians*
strong drink ! ' No, it ain't, John Stafford."

" Uncle Jerry," said John, as he felt
the old fellow's pulse, " you were one of
the first to give me wine and strong drink." John was now as much an object of pity as
of censure ; so severe was his self-condem-
nation, that he never grew angry at any
one who reproached or reproved his
drunkenness. To John's remark, Uncle
Jerry responded brightly, " I didn't know
as you were going to be a doctor, John.
Besides, why can't you use moderation —
like I do."

" My moderation *is* just about like yours,"
said John, more to himself than to his
uncle ; " and it is, in my mind, all that
moderation ever amounts to."

Uncle Jerry watched John while he meas-
ured out powders.

"I say, John, be careful now! I'm a keen one, and if you make a mistake I'll know it, and I'll think it my duty to tell it. I know more than you doctors anyhow. Hathway told me I'd got to die of that pneumonia I had, but I wouldn't, and I didn't; and you can't kill me now, John. I won't be killed. Never say die is my motto."

This disquisition having no effect on his auditor, Uncle Jerry, from his bed, planned a fresh attack. "I say, John! you're just about as much of a Demijohn as of a John. He, he! there's a joke, and a good one. I tell you, lad, before long your friends won't know which is you and which ain't! You're being absorbed swallowed; transmigrated, something of that sort, into a demijohn. Now, John, if after this mortal evil is shuffled off, like a snake's old skin, you are permitted to come back to this earth, you'll come as a whiskey jug, or a demijohn, and

zounds, John, wouldn't it be a pleasant little encounter if I came as the whiskey to fill you ! I'd be a prime article,—I always was.

All this was humiliation upon humiliation, agony piled upon agony. When he got home, he sat, his head on his hands, drawn back in a corner, as crushed and inconsolable as when he first heard of his mother's all potent vice. Agatha dared not leave him ; she tried by every gentle wile to comfort him, but at last he rushed out, ordered his horse, and dashed away. He rode to the next town and got brandy, brandy to drink, and brandy to carry home.

It was not long before Uncle Jerry's scorpion tongue was stilled. He clambered out of his window one night, and in his drunken idiocy, stumbled to a brook, where, probably slipping and falling on his face, he was found next morning drowned in the shallow water.

There were other patients left at the poor-house. John had formally dissolved his partnership with Doctor Hathway, but as no other assistant had arrived, he volunteered his attendance at the poor-house, to which the road was long and rough. “Think better of it, John.” Doctor Hathway had said, kindly, “Don’t give up the partnership; but we’ll hold together, if you’ll make a man of yourself. Give up this vile drinking. A fellow of your parts might be the ornament of his profession.

“I’ve given up all those hopes,” said John. “Nothing will stop my way to ruin. My love of drink has proved stronger than all obstacles, doctor. Love, ambition, pride, the entreaties of my friends, are as nothing at all.”

“It’s a bad job!” said the old doctor, gloomily, and was downcast all day. John, on the contrary, took brandy enough to raise

his spirits, and was lively and jesting enough to make Agatha heartsick.

If no harm came to the patients at the poor-house from Doctor John's visits, between the brandy-flask and the prancing black horse, harm came to John. He was thrown on his head upon a pile of stones, and some country people coming by, after a while, picked him up for dead.

When Agatha, from her window, saw John carried in at the front gate, limp and helpless, her first thought was that he had at length become intoxicated away from home, and, in this shameful condition, was brought to her; but Nick ran in, saying, "Mr. John's been hurt bad somehow, Miss Agatha; don't be frightened ma'am, and I'll fetch the doctor!" So Sara prepared a bed, and Agatha received her brother, who, it seemed, would come no more back to life.

When once immediate danger was passed,

and, after a week of watchful care, it became possible that John might recover, when his heavy eyes opened intelligently, and he knew the faithful sister who watched him night and day, then Agatha began to hope that this great danger and wonderful escape might be God's appointed way to bring her prodigal brother to himself, and open to him the gate of a new and higher life. In the hours of his prostration, what John called his monomania, and what others called his shameful thirst, appeared to have departed: he craved no liquors, such as had well nigh destroyed him; he lay passive as an infant. Ah, if his absorbing vice were not simply held in abeyance, but were dead, for what good things might not Agatha hope from all the coming years!

Day by day Agatha read to her brother from the word of God, spoke of the past as a hideous dream, upon which this waking shock

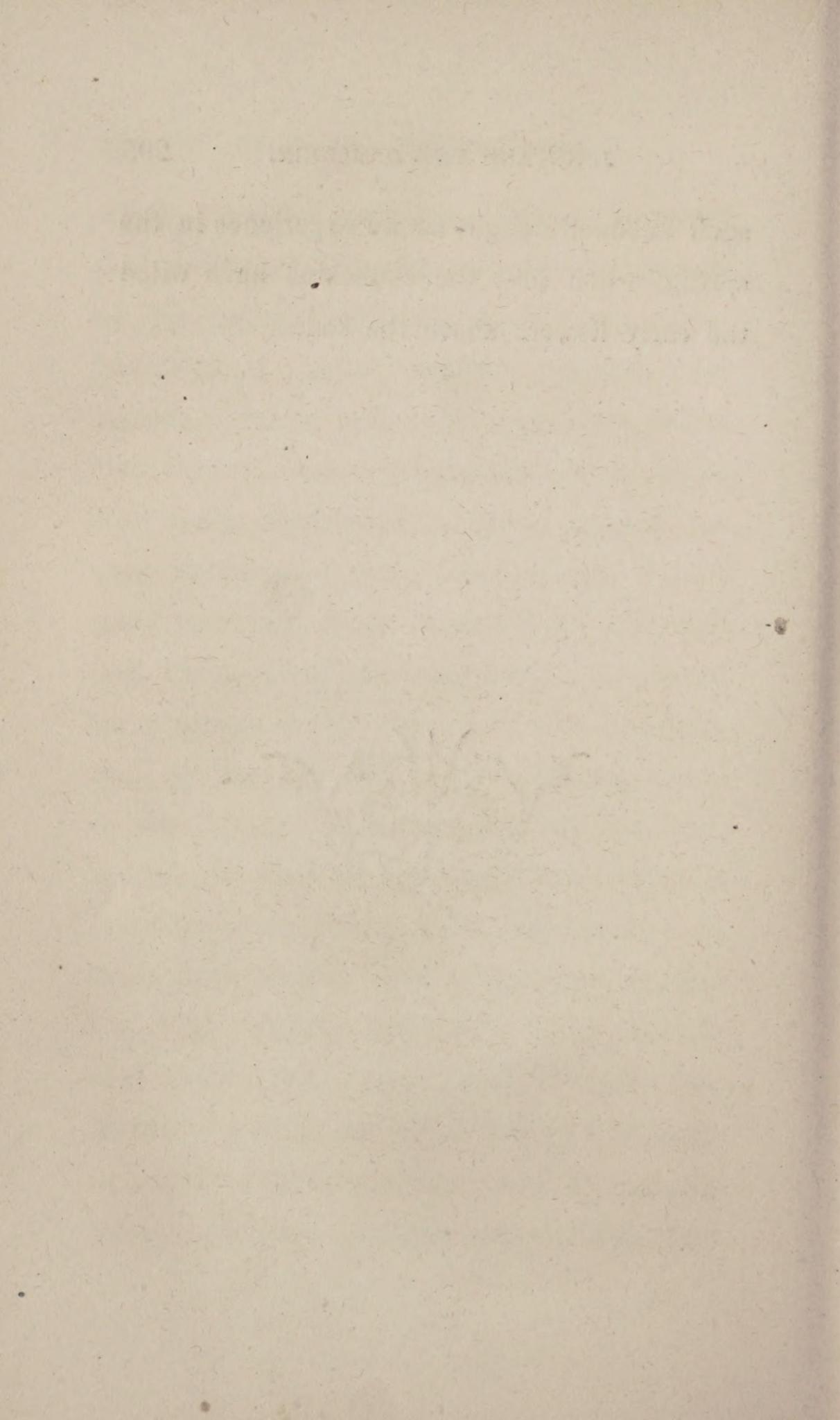
had broken, and which should be hereafter lost in the good activities of life. As she watched her well-beloved invalid in slumbers soft as those over which, in his childhood, she had kept guard, how fervently did she pray that these fresh expectations should be made blessed realities.

Once, as she watched alone with him at night, she had knelt down, her forehead pressed on the pillow where his boyish looking curls were lying, and in her earnestness had prayed aloud in his behalf. John heard her. As those solemn, tender words of supplication entered his ear, he felt that their answer must come ; he looked on his past career with abhorrence ; he fairly wondered that he had desired what now he remembered only as a fiery and unpleasant drink, whose effect was pain of body and of mind, and shameful death. Even within him stirred a faint reaching after that heart holiness

which Agatha possessed. It is a pretty thought that, in the stillness and helplessness of the night, God's angels encamp about his children; from those who watched over Agatha, benign influences may have fallen then upon John. What pity that, when the ruddy cherubs of morning carried the gray shadows to some other sphere, John's good resolvings were carried from him, and with the vigor of returning health, he looked on penitence as the offspring of a sickly brain, and, by degrees, the tastes and temptations of his former life seemed not so bad, nor, indeed, so strange and far away. Of this hereafter. Just now John was passive in his sister's hands. Doctor Hathway watched him with fatherly solicitude; Faith Temple sent toward him many kind thoughts unknown to any but herself,—thoughts blossoming into no outward token; and through the whole household John's convalescing sent

such subdued delight as we experience in the spring, when first the sunbeams have wiled the early flowers above the sod.





CHAPTER VIII.

John stands on his feet--nothing more.





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HE sins of the parent are often reduplicated in the child; when this is the case the excess of the child is apt to be greater, its struggles more violent,

its race longer and more wretched, and its

end more terrible than the parent's has been. Let this thought be a warning to all parents, who, going recklessly on the broad road to death, hear behind them the patter of children's feet,—feet that shall rush by them, trampling on their unhonorable dust, and leap to ruin between defiance and despair.

John was following in his mother's way: he went beyond his mother when, after his illness, he was once more strong in body and strong in evil. While once he had been carried to his sister nearly dead, now he was often carried to her beastly drunk.

Agatha never reproached him — how glad was she afterward that she had not! but ever received him with quiet kindness, and made his home as happy as she could.

Nick's chief business now was to follow Mr. John about, at safe distance, to keep him out of danger, and to bring him home. All at once there was a sudden pause in

this ; John quit drinking for a fortnight ; was surly and silent during that time. On one dreary March morning, Agatha sat down to her breakfast alone. She sent to see if John were coming to the table ; but John was not to be found. Noon, night, and still he did not come ; and now Agatha found that John's clothes, his rifle and rods, most of his possessions had been removed from the house ; and soon to this knowledge was added what people were whispering about the town, that John had gone off entirely ; that he had withdrawn his stock from the bank, and indeed decamped with all his available property.

In vain they searched for him here and there ; no trace was to be obtained, and what good if there had been ? John could do as he pleased, and if he pleased to leave his friends, they must accept it quietly. Agatha remembered how his mother had

thus disappeared, and how, at last, all broken and dying, she had come back to the shelter of her home. So John might return, and, if he did, he would not find Agatha cold or absent, but the inviting lights should beam from home-windows, should cheer him on his way, and, emulating the good father in sacred story, Agatha was ready to see him when he was yet a great way off, and have compassion, and run and fall on his neck, and kiss him,—to clothe him, and put on his finger the ring of reconciliation. So must we leave Agatha, vestal at the shine of home, for, as ever in the world's history, it is not the heroic endurers of griefs untold who are held up to the applause and admiration of the sons' of men.

John had resolved to release himself from all restraint, to go where the bonds of relationship or friendship might not hold him.

Whether he should drink, or should not drink, John had not yet decided. Indeed, he told himself that he had no decision to make ; he was under the control of some destiny ; and what that destiny was, he did not know. He would go to the city of New York, cut loose from friends and foes, cover his own tracks so that nobody should find him ; and maybe, in the swim for life, the demijohn would drift away from him and he could save himself, or perhaps Demijohn would cleave to him, and sink him. Leaning back in the "Owl Train" that swept him toward his destination, his hat crushed over his eyes, and apparently asleep, he kept up a busy thinking ; he thought, in the first place, that to run away in this manner was the only reasonable thing he could do. He would no longer be afraid of meeting sweet Faith Temple on the streets, nor would he see Agatha

growing worn and old over his extravagancies. Next he thought that he had money enough ; if he reformed, he could soon get a good practice and build up his fortune ; if he did not reform, he knew the Demi-john would be the death of him before he could make away with what money he had. He indulged in a melancholy dream of dying prematurely, alone, unknown, and being carelessly buried in the potter's field, with nothing to mark his grave, and nobody to weep over it. He had also a pleasant fancy of reforming, getting friends, fame, wide practice, money, in an incredibly short time, and going back to his native town, all flushed with honor and success, and marrying Faith Temple, and becoming to Agatha all that she had hoped, or his father had charged him. And so at last the rushing train, that bore John and his thrilling, trembling, hopes and fears, and hundreds

more, puffed and snorted into its darkened depot; lamps blinked drowsily high over head; unopportunely hackmen, newsboys, apple-venders, and baggage-men, hung about the passengers; men with lanterns jumped in and out frantically. John snatched his valise, buttoned his wallet and checks in his pocket, and walked off to a hotel. He did not stop at the bar longer than to get a room, and after his day of travel he was soon sound asleep.

After breakfast next morning, John went out to hunt for a boarding place. He did not choose the fashionable streets, as he wanted to be left quite to himself. He did not intend to go to a hotel, for fear his friends might search for him. He strolled through Second Avenue, along Great Jones, through a portion of the Bowery, up Houston to Broadway, on Broadway to Spring Street, and then up along

Spring to Mercer, and, going up Mercer he saw a three-story, half-genteel brick house, with "rooms and boarding" printed on a ticket hanging near the bell-handle. John rang the bell; a fresh-faced, blue-eyed, dowdy personage opened the door.

"Have you a room to let?" asked John.

"It's on the ticket," quoth the woman, looking sharply at him.

"I want a room," said John.

"Third story it is," said the dame.

"Let me see it."

So the woman took John up two flights of indifferently kept stairs, to a front room, with a matting on the floor, white curtains at the windows, a round table with a red cover, a nice looking bed, and a rack with plenty of towels; there was enough of respectable furniture, a well-cleaned grate, where a cheerful fire might brighten damp days, and altogether John thought it would suit him.

“Oh, we’re Hinglish,” said the woman, “and I ’ope we knows ’ow to keep a ’ouse. You’ll not find a better room in town for the price. Room *and* board, sir.”

“Only room; I shall take my meals elsewhere.”

“Better take ’em ’ere, sir; good comfortable family meals, sir, and nothing but respectable young gents as is boardin’ in the ’ouse. I’ve a bank, a dry-goods line, a professor, a railroad, and a hartist,” and, as the hostess thus indicated the calling of her various boards, she held up finger after finger, that they might better be numbered.

“Very excellent society, I’ve no doubt,” said John; “but I shall not take my meals where I have my room.”

“Oh, well, I don’t say as I won’t rent a room on them conditions. I ’ave one gent on them terms now: the front hattic; heats hat a restaurant; the front hattic is a daily paper. Baggage sir?”

“Yes: at the depot.”

“Pay in hadvance, is my terms with strangers.”

“Very good. I will pay in advance for each month.”

“You can ’ave the room, sir, if hit suits. ’Ope as you’ll find hit pleasant, sir. My name’s Mrs. Crow, from Hingland, sir. Belfast people, forwarding business is my ’usband. Lawyer, sir?”

“Physician,” said John.

“Yes, hexactly: knew you was a professional. The professor hand the hartist will ’ave the same floor, sir. Send your baggage soon, sir?”

“Immediately,” said John, handing Mrs. Crow his card, which she regarded for some five minutes with increasing satisfaction. The matter of a room being thus settled, the next thing was to get his baggage there, and settle his property in his room to his mind. Mrs. Crow made several errands into the

room while this was being done. She ostensibly came to bring water, toilet-soap, polish the looking-glass, bring a fresh blanket, and ask if John wanted a fire ; but the keen and constant attention she gave his trunks, made it evident that she came to see the goods of her new lodger, and thus satisfy herself as to his respectability. She glowed with delight as a handsome dressing-box was placed on the bureau, and volumes in gilt and morocco graced the little round table ; she rustled and plumed, like a pigeon in the sun, over a rosewood writing-desk, a russia leather portfolio, a silver-mounted pen-rack and tooth-pick holder ; and, when a silk-lined cashmere wrapper went across the back of a rocking-chair, and two charming little paintings took their places on her bare walls, she dashed to the kitchen and told the house-maid that now she “ ’ad got a gent has *was* a gent ;” then back to John’s room to say that

when he wanted warm water to shave, he was only to pull the bell-rope, and, while saying this, she saw a smoking-cap and a pair of slippers seek the good society of the cashmere wrapper, and the “'andsomest suit of clothes has never she laid heyes hon,” go into the wardrobe.

Our John had a girlish love of luxuries and pretty trifles. He was busy several hours in setting out the ornaments that he had been accustomed to in his room at home. At last, his rifle and fishing rods were laid over brass hooks ; his game-bags, baskets and other accoutrements, were swung near them. The third-story front room was quite altered in its air, and, when Mrs. Crow trotted up for the twentieth time to turn over a rug, and carry a footstool from the left to the right of the fire-place, she sniffed the atmosphere of the transformed apartment, as if she stood on the shore of the spiciest island in all the spicy East.

His room ordered to his mind, John locked the door and walked out toward the Astor Library. He felt a glorious sense of freedom, like a runaway school-boy, while his pockets are flush of money, and before he has got frightened, homesick and ashamed. The new scenes, the strange faces, the queer people, so occupied John's attention that he had no inclination, as yet, for mischief; and perhaps, despite all the trouble that it had brought to Agatha, waiting at home, this escapade of John's was the best thing that could have occurred. Up shabby, genteel Mercer, along West Fourth street, and into quiet, refined Lafayette Place, and now John was under the brown-stone front of the Astor Library, where, niche after niche, with light stairways climbing high, where desks and tables and shelves, from floor to lofty ceiling, hold the gathered wit and learning of the earth, the wisdom of the old-world and the

new. Hat in hand, with light tread and head slightly bent, John entered. As of old, some seeker for instruction entered the threshold of the temple where Apollo's oracle responded from the remote adytum.

Well-a-day, in this world, the sublime and the absurd, the good and ill, the spiritual and the physical, crowd hard upon each other. Who will doubt that, after the intense interest of some new book, after long time spent in pondering the pleasant pages, John began to remember that the hotel breakfast had been early partaken ; that lunch-time had long passed, and that it would be well to get dinner ?

Looking for dinner, he did not go to places where he might meet stray acquaintance from the town, the home he was now to banish from his mind, waiting to see how events would turn ; but he found a comfortable restaurant, kept on the Conti-

mental plan,—a place beloved of Bohemians, who make their nests in the towers of the University building; of students at the Medical College; of artists and waifs, who manage to raise enough to keep soul and body together, and broadcloth on their backs, in the seething mass of New York life. John liked the fare and the attendance. He did not call for any wine, and, having eaten his dinner, he resolved to frequent that restaurant, at least until their cookery palled on his taste and he had seen all the varieties of people who made a habit of going there.

A month slipped away. John went often to the Astor Library, spent mornings at Goupil's and The Dusseldorf, strayed now and then into Cooper Institute, visited the Historical Societies' rooms and the Museum of Egyptian Antiquities, was nightly at opera, theatre, or lecture, and, though he might have been much better employed than in being

at two of these places, still he had kept out of saloons, and had neither indulged in cards, billiards, nor strong drink.

He made no acquaintances ; the “bank, the dry-goods line, the professor, the railroad, and the hortist,” at Mrs. Crow’s, had never found him in his room if they had taken the trouble to call ; the landlady had become quite maternal in her feelings toward him. His room was in good order, he was not aware that the laundress had stolen any of his clothes, and life was going easily with John, though his was only a busy idleness, and he was as aimless as a leaf floating on a stream.

He went into his favorite restaurant one day for dinner, passed a man sitting at one little marble table, and took his place at another, with his back nearly to the stranger. A waiter passed him with a tray having a salad, a slice of beef, and a square bit of

bread, and set it down at this other man's elbow, and then came for John's order. While roast lamb, asparagus, and beef patties are coming up for John, let us lend a moment to consider how, to some men, some other man is an evil genius ; how this evil genius follows his unconscious victim, starts up unexpectedly before him, lies in wait at the by-corners of his life, lures him, deceives him, destroys him ; the one man hardly conscious what is wrong, and the other scarcely realizing that he is the thing he is. Here, just at what might have been — who knows ? — a turning-point in John's life, he had gone to eat his dinner, and lo ! his evil genius sat eating beef and salad just behind him. John discussed lamb and patties ; a rattle just behind indicated the knife-and-fork achievements of his companion.

John, given to luxuries, as we said, had just ordered a plate of early strawberries for

lunch, and was resigned to the removal of asparagus, when there was a step behind him, a jovial slap on his shoulder.

“John, old boy, how are you? ’Pon my my word, I’m glad to see you!”

John looked up: there was — Joe.

Quickly came to John a memory of that hospital affair; of keys treacherously obtained, and shamefully used. Would he shake hands with a thief, a thief who had brought him to shame? He thrust his hands into his pockets, leaned back, and looked defiance.

Joe flung himself into a chair, gazed jovially at John.

“Why, John, bless me, John, what’s up? Can’t you give your fist to an old friend?”

“A friend!” sneered John. “Have you such a sieve of a memory as not to remember the vile trick you played on me at the hospital?”

“Upon my life, John, I don’t know what

you mean ; and, if it wasn't for old-time friendship I wouldn't take your talk ! ”

“ Didn't you get my keys there, and take drugs out of the store-room, about two hundred dollars' worth ? ”

“ Well, I didn't,” said Joe, flatly.

“ You did, and that porter Randall knew it ; and there I had to pay him two hundred and ten, to shut his mouth, and after all I laid open the matter to the head surgeon, and paid him two hundred down, to make up.”

“ Bless me, how soft you are, John ! ” said Joe, chuckling inwardly. “ Never had a thing to do with it, give you my word of honor. That Randall must have taken the drugs, if there were any taken, and gulled you completely : why didn't you send him up for it ? Say I took drugs ? Never, sir, only what you humbugging doctors have stuffed down my throat. John, I'd knock you over for

that, only I know you always were a hot-headed, hasty-tempered, good-hearted dog. I forgive you ; there's my hand on it."

John was not proof against Joe's effrontery. It is undeniable that there was a weak spot in our hero. He slowly drew his hand from his pocket : " Well, if that's so, Joe, — — "

" It *is* so," said Joe, cordially grasping John's half-offered hand. Just then, the strawberries came. Joe declined to have a dish ordered for him ; but sat, talking, as John ate.

" What are you doing here, John, my boy ? got a flourishing business, and making trade lively at the undertaker's and marble yards ? "

" I'm not practising," said John ; " just looking about, and trying to enjoy myself."

" Yes, you lucky dog, you've got money. Well, I've turned over a new leaf, John, working like everything ; I'm connected with a daily paper. Pshaw, it is no use being

shy with you. I'm not very flourishing ; but I keep the wolf at bay, while I secure "items" for the *Times*. I lounge about everywhere, hearing things, and dress all up to electrify the public, as said public eats its breakfast and reads its paper. Keeps me going, night and day ; but I never was a lucky dog. I eat here, generally, and I have an attic room round in Mercer street, at the 'ouse of a Hinglish 'oman,' named Mrs. Crow."

John dropped his spoon, in amazement : was Joe Mrs. Crow's "hattic as got his meals hout," as she described her lodger at one time ; the "Daily Press," as she mentioned him at other times.

"That's just where I live," said John.

"Possible ! Third-story front ? Why, I've heard the praises of a 'gent as is a gent, with no hend of fandangos and money in his pocket,' as Mrs. Crow graphically describes you. Well, good-by, John ; this is

like old times. I'll see you again,—often, I hope. I must trot off now and see if I can see a 'knock-down,' or hear of a 'suicide,' or 'found drowned,' or 'runaway match,' or 'saloon row,'—all's fish to my net."

Off went Joe, reckless Bohemian of the lowest order. As Joe went up street, John meditated that "Joe wasn't so bad a fellow, after all;" and Joe soliloquized that "John had money, and was soft; that he should indubitably share his money, and that overhauling him was the best stroke of work he'd done this long while;" though what work it had been, unless it was work to tell any amount of lies, we are quite unable to determine.

After this, Joe managed to find John constantly; but did not take any extreme measures to bring John into evil doings at once. He saw John in a new character, and he wished to study carefully that character be-

fore he exposed himself. They often went to places of amusement, or to get little suppers together ; and, somehow, it was always John who paid the bill. In return, Joe took John with him to queer places, item-hunting ; and there was, to John, a romance and fascination in going into such new company, and knowing what was to be in the paper before other people knew it, and in seeing how Joe dressed up incidents and accidents until they were twice as wonderful to read of as to see. Joe also favored John with choice morsels of his private history,—things tending in no wise to John's edification. For instance, passing a hotel, one day, Joe said : “ There's a little exploit of mine connected with this house,—I'll tell you, John. I went there, one night, without a cent. I had an old travelling bag, and it was pretty well stuffed with my extra clothes. I put down my name, called for a

room, and went up to it. Well, I had lodging and breakfast. After breakfast, I went up to my room, to arrange for leaving, without paying my bill. I put on a double suit of clothes, all through,—socks, shirts, coats, and everything. I stuffed handkerchief, ties, gloves, and all those little things, in my pockets, buttoned myself up, and oh! how hot and tight and uncomfortable I felt! Then I filled the bag with sheets, towels, pillow-cases, and so forth, from the room; walked down to the clerk, and asked him to keep my bag until I went down town. He never seemed to notice that I was twice the size I was when I came; but he took the bag, and off I went,—never went back, of course.”

John did *not* think this a nice performance; he saw it was mean and dishonest, beneath any one who pretended to be a gentleman. Yet he laughed, because he

thought Joe would call him “spooney” if he did not. What a pity John was such a coward.

Another of Joe’s tales was this:—“I was standing at a depot, expecting to get on the train, and after I’d made a few miles get put off, for I hadn’t a cent. Up comes an Irishman:—‘Please, sur, will you hold me ticket whoile I buy me loonch? I’m fearing I’d mislay it.’ Hold his ticket, you know, as if he’d said, ‘hold my horse!’ Up comes the train, on jump I with the emerald’s ticket, and ride as far as it’ll take me.”

“Rob a poor man of his ticket!” cried John. “I’d be ashamed to own it.”

“Oh,” said Joe, “it was good for one day only,’ and that was the last train, and the man off somewhere getting drunk, likely. I used it to save it; eh, John?”

“It was a shabby trick.” said John, smartly.

“ Yes, yes, you were always soft that way, John ; you gave back the old man’s apple money, I remember, at College.”

How well are such as Joe described in Jeremiah : “ They are sottish children, and have none understanding : they are wise to do evil ; but to do good they have no knowledge.”

As John made no reply to Joe’s reminiscence, Joe said, presently, “ I tell you John, you lucky dogs who are born with silver spoons in your mouths, don’t know how my set get on.”

“ You were able to go to College” said John.

“ Yes, my uncle sent me there ; and, when I got rusticated or expelled, he said I wasn’t making a good use of my opportunities. As I didn’t toe the mark close enough to suit him, he cut me loose, and I’ve drifted about ever since. One place where I went to board I took a trunk, a

second-hand, cheap thing, and filled with paper, stones, and so on ; and when I didn't pay my board, the landlady — Irish woman — said she'd seize my trunk. I begged off as long as I could, and when I found she was truly about to seize, I decamped, and a jolly trunk full she got."

"I hope you don't mean to serve Mrs. Crow so," said John. "She is a kind, honest woman."

"I don't mean anything about it ; I shall pay her if I can. I owe her twelve dollars now, and she duns me continually, but I haven't a red to pay her ; and I know she needs the money. She'll take my things some fine morning, but they won't be worth the bill to her, and I'll be used up without them."

"Can't you raise money anyway ?" asked John.

"Not unless I borrow, and I don't know

one chap with money but you. Maybe you'd lend me some? I'll pay you back sometime — honor bright."

John lent Joe twelve dollars. Joe gave Mrs. Crow seven dollars "to stop her mouth," he said; the remaining five he spent at a gambling saloon, and won, unfortunately, thirty dollars. He then paid John twelve dollars, telling him he got it by writing for a weekly paper, and the next night went back to gamble again. He had paid John, so that John would be ready to lend him a larger sum at some future time. At his second visit to the saloon, he lost every cent he had, got drunk and cross, and was finally pushed into the street, minus hat, kerchief, and pocket-book.

With diabolical coolness and cruelty, Joe laid his plans about John. His main object was to get a share of John's money, and he did not wish him to get to drinking to such

an extent as to use all his funds on himself; neither must John get industrious enough, and gain self-respect enough, to be above Joe's society.

Joe managed that John should pay both their bills at the restaurant, and one while, he would borrow money to pay a pressing bill at the tailor's, another time he would get money to pay the boot-maker, and sometimes he would go through the farce of giving John his note for the borrowed sums. John, ever reckless, and never accustomed to pecuniary necessity, lent carelessly, hardly knowing what he gave to Joe; one time ten dollars, another time twenty, again five, "just for a few hours;" and on John's money Joe gambled and got drunk and feasted his riotous companions, telling them enlivening tales of how "soft" John was, and how "spooney." So much got John by his companionship with the wicked. There were

others of John's college acquaintance in New York, men whose society might have done him good; but Joe, his evil genius, was as yet the only one he found.

And now, lest John should be reformed and go home, or get into practice, and find a circle of valuable acquaintances, Joe brought John once more into friendship with the demijohn. Yes: a demijohn well filled stood in John's closet, and Joe assured him it was the height of felicity to have lemons, eggs, sugar, apples, spices, and figs in neat tin boxes in his closet, and from them concoct, of nights, a variety of stimulating drinks, heating them over the gas-burner.

Mrs. Crow kindly, ignorant, fussy woman, looked, ill-pleased, on the intimacy between her favorite boarder and the "hattic" she had always regarded with suspicion and dislike.

"Hi 'ave no doubt, Mr. Stafford," she said

one morning, "that my railroad or my dry-goods line or my hartist would be much more hagreeable society for a young gent like you, than my hattic."

"My acquaintance with Joe dates back to when we went to college together," said John, who was lounging in Mrs. Crow's parlor, while that worthy woman dusted her mantel and its multitude of china trinkets.

"Hi do suppose," said Mrs. Crow, "that in college gents has his gents do get acquaintance of gents has his no gents hat all. My professor 'ere his has fine has need be, when you get to know him; but very still and stiff the professor is with strangers. I 'ad a 'olesale groceries 'ere has was a fine gent; hand I *did* 'ave a doctor, a near your hage, I should judge; but the doctor's gone hover to Canal Street, 'is practice being hin that neighbor'ood."

"I should like to meet him," said John, politely.

“A 'oman has keeps boarding hand lodg-ing,” contiued Mrs. Crow, “gets to hunder-stand pretty well the ways hof young gents. When I see a young gent has comes hin of nights, 'is 'at being gone, hand his coat hall muddied, hand when that young gent does, to my certain knowledge, borrow hand never pay, hand when that young gent 'as no fear of God nor of man before 'is heyes, hand when he roysters round hon sabbath days, as might sit quiet in the 'ouse, or walk quiet hin the street, or go quiet to church, hi sets hit down as 'ow that young gent won't do you no good nor me no good nor nobody else no good;” and, in her earnestness, Mrs. Crow let fall a china dog, and broke off its tail. Regarding this wreck of dogdom with sincere regret, Mrs. Crow continued her oration. “Says I to Crow,—forwarding business his Crow,—that hattic is going to get warning from me. I'll 'ave no hattic hin my 'ouse has 'as no regard for himself, nor

yet for me, nor yet for my young gents. Being as my hattic can't conduct has hattic should, hattic gets notice from me, he do." And Mrs. Crow, seeing that the broken tail could not be persuaded to resume its place on the dog, threw that caudal ornament in the grate, and backed his dogship up properly against the wall, where his *detailed* condition might not be noted by the casual eye.

At the end of that week, Joe got notice that his room must be surrendered, and we will do Mrs. Crow the justice to remark, that she dismissed her lodger as much with a motherly eye to John's interest as to the interest of her own pocket.

With the demijohn installed in his closet, the demon came back to John's heart. No more he sought, in the solemn shades of the library, companionship with the thoughts of great men ; no more the fair creations of the painter purified his thoughts ; no longer study

won back something of the old-time earnestness and ability ; but, day after day, he drank deeper and deeper until now Mrs. Crow saw her “gent has was a gent” reel in at night intoxicated, and was painfully aware that he went to bed at times in his boots, and in the mornings she would kindly clean clothes that were “muddied” as Joe’s had been.

All this time, Joe, the wicked, was daily with John, borrowing his money and pretending friendship for him, and bringing himself into more complete acquaintance with John’s affairs, and John into more miserable degradation.

John ceased to care for his appearance ; the demijohn seemed to be his meat and drink, and Mr. Crow was for having him requested to find other quarters ; but Mrs. Crow good woman, said he “was a young gent as ’ad been led away, a young gent as was halways kind and quiet heven when drunk,

a young gent as should 'ave a mother or sister to look hafter 'im, and 'aving none, to all appearance, Mrs. Crow was willing to play the part of both.

By October, John had spent some three hundred dollars on himself, lent as much more to Joe, and then had his first attack of delirium tremens. Mrs. Crow pitied him, nursed him, and, when Joe came to see him, refused to let him in, and unbraided him with being the ruin of as "nice a young gent has never she laid heyes on."

John's constitution was not very strong, and, after the grip of the drunkard's delirium had relaxed, he fell into a fever. Mrs. Crow said he must have a doctor and a nurse, and Mr. Crow, finding the invalid's pocket book lined with a hundred-dollar bill, said so too.

Mrs. Crow sent for the young doctor who had gone from her house to Canal street;

who coming to the patient's bedside, lo ! two old mates were together again, for it was Lester who stood holding John's hand, his finger on the throbbing pulse, and his eyes fixed anxiously on the flushed face of his old "chum." Was this inebriate the jocund boy with whom he had laughed over college frolics, who had robbed him of his oysters, treated him to merry suppers, and at last met him often in the medical class-room, as they pursued their later studies ?

John's cheeks took a deeper glow than of the fever, his eyelids quivered and fell, his lip trembled — from very shame he turned his face to the wall — was this the end of all the olden boasts and ambitions ?

Demijohn, demijohn, come out of the closet, and be adjudged to capital punishment and perpetual obloquy for a murder of a body and a murder of a soul !

"Hi 'ope he ain't dangerous, sir," said Mrs. Crow.

"No, no," said Lester. "I'm glad you called me; he's an old friend, a dear friend. Leave us alone, if you please, Mrs. Crow."

"He's surely a young gent hif 'e's a friend to the doctor," reported Mrs. Crow to her husband; "'forwarding business was the husband,' you know."

Lester was John's deeply interested physician. He brought him a capable nurse, and, until the patient was convalescing, neither doctor nor nurse remitted their attentions, and perfect mental and physical quiet for John was maintained. When John was able to sit up, in the wrapper and slippers admired by Mrs. Crow, Lester said to him,—

"John, I want to bring a clergyman to see you."

"I don't want to see a clergyman," said John, flushing.

"You'll want to see this one: it is Sam, your old room-mate. He has a mission

church, way down in Cortland street. He is a poor man's preacher, I am a poor man's doctor; but I trust we are both doing good in our lives, and I want you to see him."

Of course, Sam came. During hours which these two friends spent with John, he told them all his story: his struggles and downfalls at home, his secret departure from his native place, his easy, harmless life, his meeting with Joe, and, thereafter, his steady course down, down, down into those depths where manhood and friends and fortune and honor die.

"There's a demijohn of whiskey in that closet, now," said John, pointing out the place, sadly enough.

"And have you been drinking it, recently?" asked Lester.

"No: I don't care for it; when I am sick and weak, I lose all taste for it."

"Then here's the moment to begin a

complete reform. You may give me that demijohn of whiskey, and I'll use it for making liniment for my rheumatism patients."

"Take it and welcome," said John; "but when I go out into the streets, and meet somebody who says take a drink, or see a bar all set out invitingly, there I am gone again. I'm doomed, boys, no mistake. I inherited a taste for liquor, and it is as strong as my heart beats."

"You must go where no whiskey is to be had; go where you can't get liquor, and can get pleasant occupation, and stay one year, two years, five years, until your taste for strong drink has died a natural death."

"And where could I go?" questioned John: "no place in this country; where there are ten men gathered together, there's a whiskey shop, and somebody to ask you to drink."

"Go where there are not ten men," said

Sam. "You used to be quite a sportsman, fond of wood-craft; go to John Brown's tract, and turn hunter or trapper, and live there until your body is tough and strong, and your thirst for the demijohn is gone."

"It is winter now," said John. "I am not used to exposure. I could not get along in those snowy woods and cold storms like a man less used to the soft things of this life. Next spring I might go there; but next spring would be too late, too late."

"I tell you what," cried Lester: "go southward. There you would enjoy the climate: it would brace you up."

"Worse and worse!—go to the temptations of southern cities!" cried John.

No, go to one of those fair, uninhabited Islands. There is Tybee, just opposite Cockspur, and Fort Pulaski. It is woody, lovely, warm; a beach full of shells, a forest full of flowers, bugs, and birds for

specimens. Take a tent, cooking apparatus, camp-bed and chair, mess chest, books, writing materials, hunting and fishing equipments, get acquainted with nobody, live a hermit, be always busy, and perhaps you can get cured."

"What security have I of getting there safely. I may fall into temptation while I am buying my outfit, or going to my retreat. O," he groaned aloud, "for me there is no hope."

"Come now!" cried Sam, "I've had no vacation this summer; there is such a stampede of ministers during the hot weather, that I felt it my duty to stay and mind my sheep. I can get somebody to take my place for a while, and I'll rest by going along with you, and seeing you settled. I'd like it of all things. I think we had better go to Savannah, and buy your outfit and stores there, and get a little

sloop or yacht to take you over to your island."

This was a Quixotic expedition, but John would be ruined by the city, refused to write or return home, and was all in favor of a season of camp life.

Mrs. Crow mourned greatly over his prospective departure; he had been taking his meals in the house lately, and was a very profitable "young gent." John left a large portion of his personal property in her keeping, and when, one October morning, with Sam, he was ready to depart, Mrs. Crow stood weeping at her door, calling down blessings on his head, and exclaiming of her longing for "the 'appy day as she might see that dear young gent returning to 'er 'ouse all safe and sound."

Sam had deemed it a duty to look up Joe, and strive to turn him from the error of his ways. John had given Joe's present address,

and Sam, on calling at the house, was met by a shrewd, sharp-voiced woman, who, on being asked for her lodger, volubly exclaimed, "He was gone, thank fortune; such a rascal might she never see more. He had never paid her but five dollars of money, for one month's advance; and he'd got in a row at a gambling room, and had to run from the town, the police bein' after him; and what does he leave, pray, but one valise of shavings, one bag ditto, one box coal cinder, *and* ditto. If the gentleman is anything to him, she hopes he'll pay, ten dollars for room rent, forty-five cents for one broken lamp, forty cents for two lights of glass, also broke, indeed."

But Sam was nothing to Joe in the way of paying his debts, so he made his escape from the voluble woman, feeling as if he had been standing exposed to a hail storm.

And now, on an ocean, calm in a sunny

week of October, into climes growing fairer and warmer, through four days of southward travel, greeting the sun, rising red and bold over an expanse of orange and crimson waves ; noting the moon and stars at night, reduplicating their beauty in the sea ; looking idly on the wake of foam the stanch ship left behind as she sped along her way, thinking, no doubt, how that Ocean, stretching North, beat on a beach where his feet had often trod, and that the boom of those very waves along the coast was heard by Agatha, lonely in her childhood's home, by Faith, whom, in his folly, he had lost forever, — went John, seeking a refuge for himself; from the Demijohn. Sam told him his only sure refuge was in the Grace of God ; but John preferred to seek his help from finite things.

CHAPTER IX.

The Demijohn has John Down.





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T Savannah
John secured
a tent, a
mess-chest,
and small
camp cooking
apparatus.
He bought a
bold, faithful,
lion-like dog,
and hired a
tidy, honest,

garrulous old negro to go with him as servant.

John began to be quite lively when fairly equipped in shooting suit, with all manner of hunting and fishing supplies. He was finally landed on a secluded part of Tybee, at the edge of a wood, where the high tides came almost to his tent, which was pitched in the shadow of a great oak. Sam remained with him a few days, wandered with him over the lovely island where he was playing Crusoe, visited the Martello Tower, and, at last, with many good wishes, left him to his fate. Before going, Sam privately gave to the negro a directed envelope, telling him to keep it safely, and, if Mr. Stafford got into any trouble, or disappeared, to have a letter written and forwarded in it. The negro nodded, tapped his head significantly, and set himself to look after his new employer with especial care. John was in high spirits: he had always loved the woods, and to roam about at will; and, while he was too much of

a Sybarite to endure the roughness and privations of a wild life, he enjoyed living as he did now, with his books, drawing material, servant to wait on him, tent to shelter him, food to his taste, and powerful, sagacious dog to follow his going out and coming in.

The negro owned a dug-out, an oyster-rake, and a big knife. When the tide was low, John would get in the dug-out with his servant, and be rowed to some of the oyster-shoals, which showed long, chalky ridges above the low-water mark ; there they would collect as many oysters as they needed, and the negro could cook them in different ways.

“ There is one thing,” said John : “ we can have nothing baked, as we have no oven.”

“ Oh, got oven enough,” said his servant. “ I’ll make sich an oven as you never see afore.”

Sure enough, he dug a hole in the sand, lined it with flat stones, and, having heated it,

by burning wood in it, he soon had an oven where he could bake whatever John desired. Sometimes they would go out crab-fishing; then John would shoot curlews for a new supply for his larder. Fish of all kinds was abundant; and, as it was but small labor to fish and shoot for two, John had ample time to stuff birds, collect and press flowers, gather and polish shells, and mount beetles and butterflies in the handsome cases he had brought prepared. How pleasantly the days sped on, darkened, sometimes, by the thought of Agatha, anxious and lonely; and a sting of self-reproach that he, whom she loved so well, had been no better brother, made no more kind return! But these shadows he banished in the thought that he might one day go home firm in the right, and make compensation for all the sorrows of the past. Knowing his own weakness, John did not trust himself to visit the Fort at Corkspur

Island, which lay near him, and, indeed, had established himself on an opposite side of Tybee, that he might see as little of the officers there as possible, fearing that they would tempt him as Joe had done. The officers thought him a queer fellow, given entirely to scientific pursuits, and troubled him very little. John had a hammock swung to the limb of a large tree, and in this hammock he would lie and read for hours, the warm sunlight, the chirp of birds, the flowers on the grass, and the gorgeous blossoms of the trumpet-creepers swaying over his head, mocking the idea that it was winter, and that white acres of snow were lying coldly about his home.

If the islands lying along the coast of Georgia and South Carolina, have not the superabundant luxuriance of the tropics, they are yet very gardens of greenness, bloom and beauty, and have few of the venomous reptiles

and insects that abound nearer the equator. Happy is he, who, away from northern cold and storm, can spend a winter invigorated by the breezes from the sea, wandering day after day by the sunny waves, dwelling in one long, bright June.

When weary of the hammock, John would spread a fur robe he had, in the bottom of the dug-out, stretch a flag for an awning overhead, and rock on the incoming tide, lulled by the soft-lapping of the waves upon the sand, lazily indulging in the luxury of dreams. There had been days when, moved by ambition to do and be, John had had little time to waste in idle dreaming; the demijohn had drowned his ambition, and now he was the mere dreamer, as nearly nothing in the world as man can be, he might have sunk slowly, unheeded, under the waves of life's sea, like a paper boat, no one knowing, missed only by the true heart of his sister.

He at first sent the negro up the river to Savannah for supplies, and as mail-carrier. On clear days he could faintly discern, in the distance, white, shining tips of spires that marked the city.

After a time, he began to think he could go himself. He went once to Cockspur, visited the fort, the fort-hospital, and made the acquaintance of the surgeon resident there. Then he went to Savannah, taking his dog and his negro along, and spent several hours wandering about the city; but, as he knew nobody, he merely bought some books, either to kill his beetles, a box of colors, and so went back to his tent again.

Again he went, leaving the negro to look after his possessions at Tybee, and, when he had gone again and had stayed all night, and had come home in good order every time, he grew quite confident in himself, and began to be exultant, and thought Tybee

lonely, and liked the looks of the city very well.

He wrote to Lester, that in May he should go to New York, spend the summer in that wild, northern part of the State known as John Brown's Tract, and then go home to his sister, and settle down for life.

“God grant it,” said Lester, as he read the letter, and laid it away in his desk. He replied to it; but that was the last letter he ever had from John.

Meanwhile, early in March, John went to Savannah, bought a new shooting suit, had a quantity of groceries packed up, sufficient to last him until he went northward in May. He was sauntering along the streets, looking idly here and there, when somebody rushed up behind him, slapped him boisterously on the shoulder, cried “Old boy, how are you, how are you? glad to see you, upon my honor; give us your hand, John,” — and there was the inevitable Joe.

John was *not* glad to see Joe; indeed he was dismayed; he felt as if some cruel fate had overtaken him, as if his evil genius had found him out. But Joe never noticed his hesitation, his shrinking back, his flush of anger and uneasiness; but was overwhelmingly cordial, held his hand, asked how he had been, where he had been, how he was, and what he was doing, complimented his appearance, and declared a dozen times “he was glad to see him, upon his word.” But then we know Joe’s word wasn’t worth a straw.

Joe fairly forced John into the parlor of a hotel; here he said he wanted to compare notes with him, and he told some extravagant lies, with such an air of truthfulness, that John absolutely began to believe him; said he was glad to meet him, so he could repay him “that little debt;” half pulled out his pocket-book as if to pay on the spot, and then, having wormed out of John his

present abode and manner of life, declared, uninvited, that he meant to go over there and stop a few days with him, rest and recruit, and square up all old scores. He was jolly and witty, made John laugh, found out when he would be starting back, and said he would "fly round and gather up his traps."

What a pity that John did not here escape from him. But no; just at the moment of departure, Joe came on board, loaded with his cloak, bag, and some other properties not fully exhibited. John was dull at first, telling himself, idly, that "all was of no use, the game was up; he was doomed to destruction." But Joe chatted and joked on, told tales, made puns, related wonderful exploits of his own in hunting and fishing, and at last John cast care to the winds, and foolishly and wickedly bade himself "take matters as they came."

"I say, John," cried Joe, installing him-

self coolly as master of ceremonies, “ we’ll have a little reunion supper. This sea air gives one such an appetite, a dish of fried curlews and an oyster soup won’t taste amiss ; and I brought along a basket of fruit, and some other matters, to help the supper out.” But when John, Joe, and the negro had carried all the baggage to the tent, what the “ other matters ” were, was plainly to be seen ; a Demijohn of whiskey was one of them, and Joe said he meant to have a royal bowl of punch to drink their healths.” John was ready for it. King Demijohn had only to face John one moment, to reduce him to complete subjection. The negro eyed the whiskey askance ; he had seen “ gentlemen ” much the worse for the use of it. He disliked and distrusted Joe at once, and wished him safely back in Savannah.

If John did not drink deeply at once, he did before the end of a fortnight, and

began to go to Savannah with Joe on "sprees," used up all his money — with Joe's aid, got another thousand on from New York, and began to throw away that ; and indeed was drunk at Savannah, drunk on his Island, drunk all the time ; and Joe had soon got several hundred of his money away. The old negro thought matters were getting serious, and resolved to have a letter written and sent in the envelope Sam had left ; but just then he saw a chance to take the law into his own hands, which looked too good to be regreted. Early one afternoon, John and Joe both drank so deeply, that both were overpowered by the liquor, and lay sound asleep, beyond any effort to awaken. The negro saw a small sloop lying at Cockspur Island, which he knew would sail for Hilton Head, that evening. He examined Joe's wallet, and finding he had some money, he resolved to take him

to the sloop, put him aboard, pay his passage, and tell the Captain he was bound for Hilton Head, and ought not to lose his voyage on account of his intoxication. By this means the anxious servant thought he would rid “Massa Stafford” of a very bad companion, who was ruining him, and would give him a chance to recover his former good habits. Therefore Joe was rolled into a boat, and the negro put off toward Cockspur. He accomplished the passage between the islands in safety ; but, in his anxiety to get Joe on the sloop and fairly off for Hilton Head, he did not properly secure his own boat, and it floated away. Great was his consternation ; while cheered by seeing the sails set that were carrying off Joe, he found himself a prisoner on Cockspur unable to return to his sleeping Master John.

One of the officers at the fort, pitying his distress, promised to send him over in a

boat with some soldiers who were going the next afternoon, and the negro comforted himself with thinking that John had the dog, and that there was plenty of food cooked, and the last of the contents of the Demijohn had been used. Our negro was not above telling a lie, and he resolved to tell John that Joe had woke up, and *requested* to be taken over to Cockspur, to meet a vessel bound for St. Augustine. He thought by this means, entirely to mislead him. Next afternoon the absent servant was back at the tent. Neither John nor his dog was there ; they did not come at night nor next day. The man searched for them all over Tybee, went to Savannah, and could hear nothing of them ; waited a fortnight, and still they did not return ; and then, being a faithful fellow, he packed up all John's goods, went with them to Savannah, and stored them, paid himself out of the tent,

mess-chest, and such things as would not need to be sent to John's northern friends, and dispatched a letter to Sam, with particulars, quaintly worded. Sam wrote to a lawyer at Savannah to search thoroughly for John, and failing to find him, to send his valuables to New York.

The manner of John's second disappearance was this. He had woken early in the morning, after the negro had carried off Joe, and, missing both them and the boat, had concluded they were fishing or crabbing. He felt feverish and miserable. After a plunge in the sea, he dressed, called his dog, and strolled toward the Martello Tower. His walk revived him, and, when he saw a steamer lying at anchor about a quarter of a mile out, and one of her boats which had been at the Tower getting ready to return, he wondered if he might not run away from Joe, and get to New York. He had plenty

of money with him, his goods must take their chance, and recklessly he asked where the steamer was going, and concluded to embark. He took his dog with him, and, finding the boat was bound for Charleston, resolved to go from thence to New York. He did not enjoy himself on the boat; he was restless and drank brandy, and felt bitterly that, though he could run away from Joe, he could not run away from himself, and his own base inclinations. Instead of going home from Charleston, as he had promised himself, he stayed there, drinking and rioting, until his funds were nearly exhausted. In a lucid interval, he sent to his banker at New York for five hundred dollars more, and continued his shameful career, until but one hundred dollars of that supply remained. Of this last demand on the bank his friends heard, some weeks later; but could gain no farther trace of him.

Arousing from his dissipation, John said he was now completely ruined, would struggle no more for better things, but would go to destruction as fast as he could. He found his constitution much shattered, he had had another attack of delirium tremens, and would now not go back to disgrace his friends. He said he would no longer try to live like a gentleman, or a man of property; what funds he had left should stay where they were, and go sometime to Agatha, who would make a better use of them. He would take his dog, and stroll along anywhere; what matter how shabby he looked? no one would know him, and he had fallen below all self-respect; by and by he would drop into a pauper's grave somewhere, and that would be the end of it. He fastened the greater part of his money in a belt about his waist, buttoned up his shabby coat, crushed his shabby hat over his blood-shot eyes, to shade

his haggard face, and, calling his dog, strolled out of Charleston one morning, an object of contempt, hating himself. And this was John Stafford, who might have been, who indeed meant to be, a man of note, a man of wealth and honor, a blessing to his race. He had fallen below all these fair expectations,—crushed under the demijohn. On he walked, stopping in low taverns for lodgings, some days drinking, and some days remaining sober, with no one destination in view, drifting about through the summer, growing feeble and wan, very homesick ; but too proud or obstinate to go home, longing for Agatha, and feebly resolving never to see her again.

Meanwhile Lester felt compelled to visit Agatha, and tell her all he knew of John's New York life, his troubles, his resolvings, his temptations, and what had been learned of his career on Tybee.

Agatha went to New York, to see if she could not there find her brother. Her search was fruitless, he had not returned to the city. She even advertised him as "missing," and sent his photographs about the country, to aid in his recovery. The chief of police took more than ordinary interest in the search; but nothing was effected. In fact, John was so changed that no description or photograph that was like his past self bore any resemblance to the wreck he had become. Agatha visited Mrs. Crow, heard long reminiscences told with plenty of tears and a distracting disregard to "h's," and then the unhappy sister took all the mementoes of her brother that she had found at his boarding-place or received from Charleston, made Mrs. Crow an ample present, and went home, to set his room in the order that he had once delighted in, and to entreat the Lord to send him to her, that he might not die among strangers or enemies.

A year and a half had passed since John had left his native home; the long anxiety had worn on Agatha, and now, at the latter part of September, Doctor Hathway recommended a journey for the benefit of her health.

Mr. Temple, Faith's uncle, was feeble, and thought a trip in the clear, bracing fall weather might help him; a party was therefore made up of Mr. and Mrs. Temple, Faith, Agatha, and Doctor Hathway, to go to Niagara Falls; and much enjoyment they anticipated from a visit of several weeks, when, uninterrupted by the crowds of persons that throng thither in the summer, they might view, at their leisure, all the grand and lovely scenery of that favored spot. Agatha had said she had no heart for excursions.

“ You should take all care of your health,” said Mrs. Temple; “ it is your duty. God gives us life to serve him, therefore it should be precious in our eyes.”

“Nature’s beauties never jar on our saddest feelings,” said Faith.

“Who knows,” said Doctor Hathway, “but that, in some unexpected moment, you may meet your brother.”

Agatha had thought of this; it was a hope to which she clung in many an hour of grief.

Our travellers felt as if they were seeing the great cataract at the time of greatest beauty: the forests on the islands were clothed in all the dyes of the rainbow; the dark green of the pine and juniper, the flaming red of the sumac, the maples dyed in crimson and gold, the oak faded to a sober brown, and then as by fantastic fays dashed with ruby and purple; the grass and mosses wore yet their brightest emerald tints; the leaves of the Hepatica crept among them like smouldering fires. In the clear morning sunlight, when a light, crisp frost sparkled over leaf and blade; in the high noon splen-

dors, when the day was setting over the pine-fringed Canadas in such glories as flame over the boastful Mediterranean Sea; when the moon led out the serried ranks of stars for nightly evolutions,—Agatha and Faith watched the rushing waters, the white rapids, the rising mists; with reverent love, dwelt on the works of God in nature, and by these lower strings reached upward to the marvels of his grace.

There is, on the bank of the Niagara, a few miles below the Falls, a remarkable recess of some considerable extent, guarded by an immense flat rock, filled with trees, flowers, moss-covered boulders, and trailing vines, a place knowing no scorching summer heats, sheltered from the keen blasts of winter, where flowers bloom in early February, and yet having a secret cave where ice defies the blaze of hot July.

In this recess, the Indians said the spirit

of all evil had his abode ; we trust he never knew so fair a home. Long flights of steps have been placed leading down into this retreat, and ropes stretched from them, hither and thither, that strangers may not be lost in the mazes of the spot. One can wander out to great rocks that stand in the blue waters of the river, and where experts go to spear the huge sturgeon, the river king.

Hither one day went our party, bringing a lunch to eat in the sunshine on Table Rock, and expecting to spend several hours in exploring "The Hole."

Having descended the step-ladders, Agatha got a little in advance of her party, and, following the guidance of the ropes and the sound of roaring water, wandered down the wild and shadowed descent, until, where trees and brushes parted, she reached a mass of stone, and saw the river in its majesty at her feet. Gazing, delighted, at the tossing,

white-capped waves, and the beauty of the opposite shore, seeing here and there some strong-winged and loud-voiced bird, darting and screaming up and down in the solitude, Agatha was not aware that there was any one nearer her than her friends whose voices came down to her, making low music through the stillness; presently she saw, sitting on the rocks almost below her, at a place where the fishers went to spear sturgeon, a man in shabby clothes, his cap lying by his side, a huge dog with drooped ears and tail, his nose resting on his master's shoulder, standing just behind him. The figure and posture of the stranger indicated feebleness and despondency. Agatha, started and drew back, intending to return along the path to her friends; but there was something in the close light curls, as a beam of sunlight fell across the man's bowed head, that made her stop and look again. She was holding to the

drooping branch of a tree, looking half over her shoulder as she had turned to go, and, as she checked herself and looked back, a bit of moss and stone slipped from beneath her foot and rattled to the stones below; the dog growled, the man turned quickly,—a shabby man, with sunken cheeks and deathly brow, unshaven chin and hollow chest, a wreck of man; and yet, looking into Agatha's face were eyes that had smiled on her in infant glee,—eyes that she had watched slowly closing, lulled by her songs into childish sleep,—eyes that had wept when she had wept over two open coffins, and two new-made graves.

Slowly Agatha let go the swaying larch limb; slowly, stilled by a mingled rush of joy and pain, she stepped from the rock to the path, and reached the pallid, shrinking, half-terrified wanderer. She placed her hands on his shoulders, bowed over the face he had

hidden in bitter shame. “John, John!” — he groaned as in agony; his dog laid his head against his knee and whined. “Oh, my brother, my brother!” and now great drops were trickling through John’s shrunken fingers. The dog pressed close to Agatha, and licked her gloved hand.

The Temples and Doctor Hathway now came down the path, and catching a glimpse of Agatha, and her strange companion, drew back. They knew Agatha had found her brother.

“John,” said Agatha, “you are sick.”

John made no reply; not a word had he spoken yet.

“You have wandered about long enough, poor boy,” said Agatha, “and made me unhappy enough, because I could not find you; that is all over now. You are going home with me; we will go to-morrow.”

“I cannot see anybody,” cried John ner-



"Oh, my brother, my brother!" Page 370.

uously ; “ such a wreck and wretch as I am.”

“ You shall see nobody but Doctor Hathaway,” said Agatha ; “ we will go quietly to the hotel ; the carriage is up above, and you can have your meals in your room, and to-morrow you will be yourself, John, and we will go home together. You shall never leave me again.”

“ Yes, I shall leave you, soon, forever,” said John.

Tears blinded Agatha’s eyes for a moment, but she answered, cheerily, “ I shall not believe that, John, dear. Now I will call the Doctor ;” and she sent a clear challenge up the path, which was answered by the familiar voice of the old physician.

“ Doctor, we’ll just stroll off down this other path, and if you want the carriage, go back to the hotel in it, and send it after us,” said Mr. Temple, quickly.

The Doctor met John in a frank, matter-of-fact way, saying he was glad to see him, sorry to find him sick, but all would be right now, with Agatha to look after him. The carriage was in the road just above, and then, as John meekly rose and prepared to accompany them, the Doctor added, "John, lad, I'm too fat to climb a ladder in a cloak ; it will weigh less on your shoulders than on mine ;" and so he threw his water-proof cloak over John, and hid his soiled, shabby clothes. They went up to the road, the dog following them with leaps, sniffs, and short yelps of delight.

Doctor Hathway took John to his room at the hotel, and then went to a tailor's for a suitable wardrobe for him. Meanwhile, Agatha, ever accustomed to self-repression, dressed for dinner, and prepared to meet her friends, who, good souls, only expressed their cordial sympathy by a warm clasp of

her hand, and asked no question, spoke no surprise. What a beautiful thing it is to know when to be silent!

When Doctor Hathway had, by aid of tailor, boot-maker and barber, got up his patient to his mind, he sent for Agatha. John looked much his former self, but showed his feebleness and the ravages of disease, even more plainly than while sitting on the rocks by a river. Agatha kissed him, and then examined his outfit to see if it was to her mind. The fine broadcloth, the shining linen,—the jaunty neck-tie,—and the well-fitted boots, suited her very well. She noted one lack, which next morning John found supplied, a watch and chain lying on his dressing-table in their morocco case. He could not make up his mind to face the Temples then, so, with Agatha, he took his meals in his room, and it was arranged that next morning the Doctor

should accompany them home, leaving their three friends to return at their own convenience.

“The poor lad is in a settled consumption,” said Doctor Hathway that evening to Mr. Temple.

“Bless me! what a pity; what a loss! He was a very smart fellow, and, with every advantage, it seemed as if he could hardly help making his mark in the world,” exclaimed Mr. Temple.

“It is whiskey, all whiskey, that is to be blamed for it. The Demijohn has ruined him completely. Dear, dear! what a waste of money and brains and life it has been!” said the doctor.

Before Agatha left John that night, she exacted from him a promise that he would not run away from her again.

“I shall never leave you voluntarily,” said John, sadly. “I am only too glad to be with

you, to have some rest ; to feel that somebody cares for me. My home looks very beautiful to me now. I only ask to stay there until I die."

Next morning, Agatha, the doctor, and John left Niagara. The Temples saw them getting into the carriage, and thought how differently the well-dressed young man looked from the wan stranger, of whom the day before they had had a glimpse on the rocks by the river. The only thing in common, was the huge, savage-looking dog, which was still following its master, gentle enough to him and to his friends.

"This, Agatha," said John, as he stroked the rough head of the monster, "is the only friend I have had for many months." And the dog was soon as true a friend to Agatha as to John.

Once more John was in his early home. Tears of gratitude and affection filled his

eyes, as he found his own room arranged exactly as it had been years before ; his favorite possessions all in their places ; his best-loved books laid on the table, and, among his other specimens, the collections he had made on Tybee Island duly set forth.

Sara had filled with flowers the vases on John's mantel. "He do look most dreadful bad," she said privately to Nick.

Some of their old friends came to see John ; but he was shy and distant, and showed great repugnance to society. All he wanted was to be alone with Agatha ; her presence was restful to him, her reading and singing soothed him ; he knew that, much as he deserved condemnation, she never dwelt upon his faults, or remembered his errors against him. He was weaker than any one imagined ; the only exercise which he desired, was to walk slowly about the garden, watching Nick transplant shrubbery, tie up tender

bushes in bundles of straw, and prepare the flower-beds and borders for the ensuing spring. As he looked on these gardening operations, he wondered if, when hyacinth and daffodil shook out their petals to the sun, when crocus and primrose blossomed, and silver or golden stars gleamed on the jessamine spray, he should be there to welcome them, or laid, as soon must be, under the brown earth in that hill-side burying-ground, where so many of his kindred were already sleeping; and many, alas! laid there by the curse more fatal than pestilence, fire, or sword,—the curse of rum, the let-loose horrors of the demijohn.

CHAPTER X.

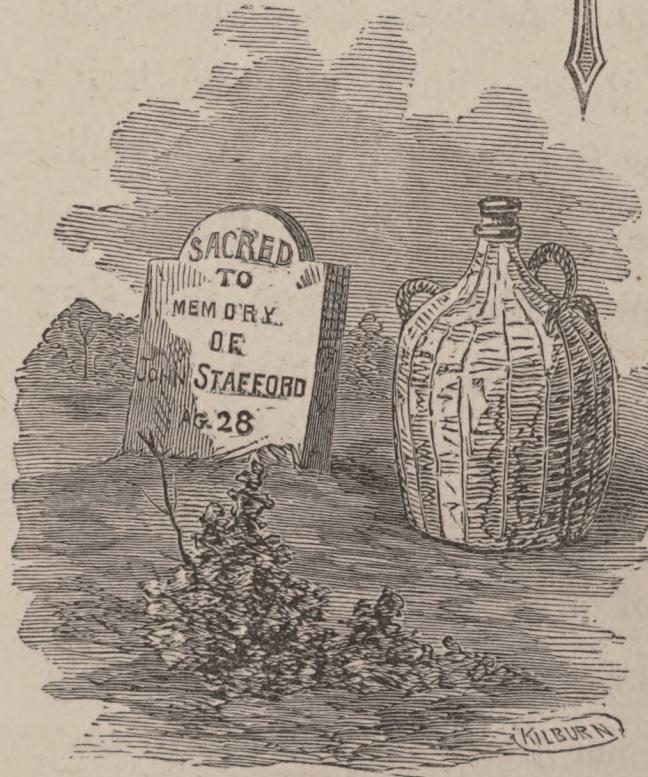
The End thereof is Death.





CHAPTER X.

The End thereof is Death.



THE November sun looked into Agatha Stafford's pleasant breakfast-room. The table, duly spread for two, was not far from the grate, with

its blazing fire. The silver breakfast service,

that had belonged to Agatha's grandmother, shone in sunlight and firelight, and, touched by a golden ray, the glass on the sideboard cast rainbows upon the wall ; and, alas ! on the sideboard were not only tumblers and water-pitcher and egg glasses, but a decanter of brandy and two little goblets, set before it, on a tray. Agatha came in, fresh as the new-begun day, and rung for toast, coffee, and eggs. As she stood near the table, putting those things straight which Sara was forever getting a hair's breadth crooked, John entered the door. He looked older now than Agatha ; his step was slow and shuffling, his shoulders drooped, his thin face was of a deathlike pallor. He went straight to the sideboard, poured out and drank a glass of brandy. In a few minutes, his eyes grew brighter, his head was better held up, and, as Sara set the last cover upon the table, he came round, and said

“Good morning” to Agatha, quite like himself.

When John had had his breakfast, and was lying comfortably on the lounge, and Agatha had been reading the paper to him while Sara carried away the breakfast equipage, and now, at last, the brother and sister were alone, Agatha said, “John, had you not better let me send that decanter off, and make one final effort to get rid of your besetting sin?”

“You needn’t be afraid of my going any farther than I am now,” said John,—“that is, to take one good strong glass each morning; it is a physical impossibility that I should. Whenever I have been ill, the thirst for liquor leaves me: as I get feebler now, I shall crave less and less. I take that brandy just because I feel used up and half dead. Until I *do* take it, I cannot eat, and can hardly drag myself about. By and by, I will

not feel well enough for one glass of brandy, and then you will not be troubled by seeing me take it."

"But why not give it up, and get well altogether?"

"Because I can't get well; it is absurd to talk about it. I haven't more than half a lung left, and I ought not to have. Consumption is the legitimate end of such a course of drunkenness as mine. I knew it all the time, and yet I drank. How can you endure me, Agatha? I hate myself!"

"I should think you would loathe the sight of the drink that has done you so much harm, and never taste it again," cried Agatha.

"I need the stimulus; I'm a mere nobody until I get it. As I told you, I won't be able to take it much longer."

"Don't give up so, John, dear; try and get well, you are so young. Don't you get stronger? Doctor Hathway said you looked brighter yesterday."

"I know my symptoms as well as he does," said John. "I can't last much longer; and, Agatha, if you were not a saint upon earth, you would be glad to be rid of one who has always been your chief torment."

Agatha left the room, in tears. She went to the library, and, taking out her writing-desk, penned a letter to Lester. She asked him to come and see her brother. "Your society will cheer him," she wrote, "and you may be able to help him. You are versed in all new remedies and expedients, and have had wide experience in your hospital practice. Doctor Hathway is kind and careful; but he may be behind these times of improvement. I cannot give John up: he must recover and retrieve the past."

John had already told Agatha his history, from the time he secretly left home, until he reached Charleston. He said he wanted her to know all his wanderings, all his temptations; it was a relief, when the memories of

the dark past pressed heavily upon his heart, to pour them out into her ear, knowing that she was not quick to condemn, but would much extenuate, and, where judgment must be stern, like a guardian angel, would temper with a tear.

Agatha was sitting in the bay window by her work-stand, John in a reclining chair, well covered with an afghan, and, his head supported on soft, snow-white pillows, looked very comfortable for an invalid.

“I shall tell you the rest of my miserable story to-day, Agatha. I don’t feel very tired, and I can talk that much. When I left Charleston, I thought I had given up everything in despair, and never expected to be any better; but after all I had not; and, as I wandered up into North Carolina, I began to think to myself that I had tried abstaining, tried shutting myself up on an island away from liquor, tried the pledge, and all had

failed ; and that, as confectioner's clerks get tired of candies by seeing it about them all the time, so I might nauseate myself of liquor, if I stopped just where it was. I put up at a hotel in a little town, a small hotel, where prodigious amounts of liquor were sold, and, after a while, I offered myself to the landlord as bar-keeper, and he accepted my service ; and, for two months, I tried whether pouring out, mixing, and tasting poison all the time, would cure me of my passion. But no : I grew worse and worse, and then, from the heat, fell into a fever, and the landlord treated me like a dog. Ah, Agatha, lying in that bare, poor room, grudgingly waited on by strangers, I thought of all the luxuries and comforts of the home from which I had made myself an exile, and I would start from feverish dreams, thinking I felt your hand on my hot head, or your voice in my ear. Sometimes I wished I would die, and never

trouble or disgrace you again: sometimes I wanted to get well, and go home; but when I did get able to escape from that house of harpies, I was ashamed to go back to you, such a broken-down prodigal. I went up through Virginia, and finally I struck the Ohio River, and worked my way down to Cincinnati on a boat. Then I used nearly all my remaining money, acting like a fool in Cincinnati, and started to work my way to Cleveland. It was easy to get to Buffalo on the lake, and then I was possessed to go to Niagara Falls, because I remembered going there once with you and father and mother when I was a happy little boy, with a bright future before me, and no thought of being such a shabby vagabond as I came to be. I had been strolling about there nearly a fortnight when you found me somehow."

"Found you by the good guiding of Providence, in special answer to my prayers," said

Agatha. “ Oh, John, you must see the hand of God in that. I had looked for you so often in busy, noisy crowds, on cars and boats, and in hotels ; but never thought to find you in such a solitude as that.”

“ It was because it was a solitude that I went there. You remember, Agatha, the wild legends of the Indians, that those who ventured down there all alone were carried off by spirits, and were seen no more. When I went down to those lonely rocks, and sat watching the mad river at my feet, I kept wishing that some sprite of river or of earth would carry me away, and that John Stafford, enemy to himself and all his friends, John, the drunken vagabond, would come up no more.”

“ Well, no vagabond did come up,” said Agatha, looking closely at a sheaf of wheat which she was embroidering : “ it was Doctor Stafford, my brother, and a gentleman, who came up.”

“ Well, well, however it may be for me, I know, instead of the water-sprite, it was the kind guardian and much-abused friend of all my life, who took my hand, and led me into civilization — to die — as I have not lived — decently.”

“ I won’t hear that, John,” said Agatha ; “ I will not hear of your dying now. I cannot, because you *are not prepared to die.*” She looked him firmly, anxiously in the face.

“ Don’t talk to me of that, Agatha,” said John ; “ you don’t know how liquor ruins souls as it does bodies. I believe it has burnt up all my sense of honor and decency, and any spiritual perceptions I may have had.”

“ I won’t believe it,” cried Agatha ; “ you have spiritual perception enough to see two things, — the only things you need to see. You *must* see them ; you are a sinner, and

Christ can be your Saviour. John, John, you can see that as long as you have any reason or heart left."

"Let me alone, Agatha ; I'm sleepy. I have told you all I have to tell. There now, dear, don't trouble me any more, and I'm not worth your worrying about."

John turned away, shut his eyes, and pulled the corner of the afghan over his face. Agatha presently closed the inside blinds, and left him ; her burden had grown too heavy for her to carry any longer, and she must go and lay it at the feet of Jesus, — the burden-bearer of all his people.

A letter from Lester was soon followed by that good friend himself. When he came, as the afternoon was mild and sunny, John was taking a turn on the piazza ; he knew that Lester was coming, but as his friend grasped his hand, a flush of shame, a sharp pang of remorse passed over him, as

he contrasted his own broken, disgraced unhappy condition, with the buoyant health, the cheerful spirit, the honorable position of his college friend, with whom he had often boasted he should be more than even in the race of life. That evening, when John had gone to his bed, very soon after tea, as now in his weakness was his custom, Lester told Agatha, that he trusted much to regular habits, excellent care, judicious medical attendance, and his youth, to restore John to health. But after a visit of several days, a close examination of his patient and consultations with Doctor Hathway, he saw reason to change his mind, and reluctantly told the anxious sister, that John had but a short time to live. "I can do nothing to help him," said Lester.

Agatha, as Lester spoke, had been looking steadily from the window, her hands clasped tightly together, and her face nearly as

white as the light fall of snow that wreathed the trees, and lay a light robe over the lately bare earth. She turned slowly toward Lester. "He will not hear a word on the subject of religion," she said, huskily. "I have no hope for him; he has made no peace with God, and he cares for none of these things."

"I will talk with him, both as physician and friend," said Lester. "We, you know, may plant and water; you also know who only giveth increase."

Lester had a long and serious conversation with John.

"I made a wrong choice years ago," said John. "Don't you remember, Lester, how you used to talk to me? Your course has proved, that godliness is profitable for all things, both for the life that now is, and that which is to come.' As for me, I have chosen 'Death rather than Life; ' it is no

more than right, Lester, that each separate choice should hold good."

"John, John," said Lester, grasping his sick friend's hand, "how can you talk so coolly of such terrible, such mighty interests!"

"You've no idea what an apathy drunkenness breeds," said John, settling himself back on his pillow. "I'm a body of death sure enough, a vital tomb of all good emotions. I ought to be ready to fall down and worship Agatha; but how sluggish and selfish are my feelings! I have forgotten to blush at my mother's grave. I loved Faith Temple once. I think now I can only be glad that I was not permitted to make her life miserable. All I ask is to be let alone. To me, Lester, the argument in the Apocrypha is true: Wine is stronger than wit, woman, or the king. There is a 'Woe' pronounced in Scripture to them that 'rise up early in the

morning, that they may follow strong drink, that they may continue until night, until wine inflame them : ' that ' woe ' has followed hard after me, has overtaken me, has destroyed me. ' ”

“ It is not yet too late for better things, ” said Lester : “ pray for a genuine, hearty penitence. ”

“ I do not know what the penitence is, and I do not know how to pray, ” said John, stubbornly.

Lester had gone. Agatha could not make any impression on John by anything she might say. He passively allowed her to read the Bible to him daily, and sometimes turned over its pages himself. One day he read aloud the passage, “ Awake, ye drunkards ; and weep and howl, all ye drinkers of wine. ”

“ Agatha, ” he said, “ I wish every drunkard on the face of the broad earth could be brought to howl out the horrors he feels, until the voice

of their weeping should fill the world, and rise up to Heaven, such a doleful, most miserable crying as would frighten every human being from wine and strong drink. What a curse and ruin it is everywhere! The demon of the demijohn is the veriest fiend of all the myriads over which Satan reigns."

Agatha said nothing; but John interpreted her looks.

"You wonder why, thinking thus, I still take my morning brandy. Only because my ruin is complete. I can be hurt no more. I am in that deepest deep beneath the deep."

"It can hurt you," said Agatha: "it may harden your heart, and close your ears to words of eternal life."

John turned away as he usually did, and there was a long silence. Finally he broke out,—

"Agatha, when I am dead, if you do jus-

tice by my grave, you will put on it that accursed demijohn which has poisoned, blighted, crushed, destroyed me!"

"John," said Agatha, "I wish you would see a minister. You tell me you are dying, and yet you will allow no minister of God to come to you. See one for my sake, if not for your own."

"I *cannot* see one," cried John. "Your minister is a stranger to me. He cannot care for me; he cannot feel anything but studied interest in me. He will come here and look on me as a monster of iniquity. He has heard tales enough of John Stafford. I feel an unutterable horror of strangers; their faces and voices are agony to me. I shrink from their presence as from coals of fire."

"There is one who is no stranger," said Agatha; "one you will not shrink from,—that is Sam. I shall write to him this very day."

John made no objection, and so his old room-mate was written to, to come and minister at his dying bed.

Sam came readily. He had for John almost that tenderness that Agatha felt. He knew the unhappy softness and pliability of his disposition, the thirst he claimed to have inherited. As he recalled the noble, earnest boy, whose genius and scholarship and good-nature he had envied, Sam could have wept.

Sam remained several weeks. During his stay, John banished the decanter of brandy, and much of his asperity and suspicion melted away. Thereafter, he heard religious conversation and exhortation in silence, and without assuming either weariness or sleep. One morning, Agatha came into his room — for now he was a prisoner in his own apartment — when she knew that Sam had been reading and praying with him.

John caught her earnest, longing, entreat-
ing gaze. He took her hand. "Ah, Agatha,
can a clean thing come out of an unclean ?
Can the leopard change his spots, the Ethio-
pian his skin ? Can the dregs in the lamp
of life burn up with a clear, strong light ?
Shall a tossed, broken, dismantled wreck,
which the sea rejects as too mean for a prize,
enter a harbor like a good ship coming home
from prosperous voyages ? You have hoped
too much for me, Agatha. It is the old
story. How often do women hope too much
from poor, erring foolish men ?"

He spoke lightly, and Agatha was sick at
heart.

The night before Sam left, he handed
Agatha the last paper from the city, point-
ing to a certain paragraph. It contained
the fate of Joe. He had been shot dead
in a drunken brawl, in a gambling saloon
in New Orleans.

March came, cloudy and rainy ; fevers were abroad, the town lay under the shadows of death. Many, besides Agatha, were watching by dying beds.

“Mrs. Temple is going to die,” said Dr. Hathway to Agatha, as, one evening, he had come to see John. He came more for form’s sake than anything else: his patient was beyond all helping. He was bolstered up in his bed, day and night, his shrunken hands clasped over the white counterpane, speaking little, apparently suffering little, physically. He had said nothing about Joe; but now, when the doctor spoke of Mrs. Temple, John looked up at his sister.

“Joe’s dead, too. I used to think him my friend, then my worst enemy; but my worst enemy has been myself. I remember when I tried to out-drink him,—just a lively boy, then. Oh, if boys would only take warning by us two! Sam and Lester, now in

their prime, just for making good choice and right start, then. Joe dead in dishonor, and I'll go next. I could stand a little more than he could ; but not much, and we'll both be gone under, to a demijohn."

Agatha went, once or twice, to see her sick neighbor ; but soon, John grew too ill to be left, and Mrs. Temple died and was buried ; and word came that Mr. Temple was very sick, and Agatha could not go to comfort Faith, though their houses were not far apart.

Doctor Hathway came, another evening, and now his news was that Mr. Temple was dead.

"I'll sit with John while you go get your tea, Agatha," said the doctor. It was almost April, and there had been a sunshine, for a variety, and now the mellow moonlight vied in beauty with the buried day,— the day that had gone down in loveliness, and was buried in the sea.

As Agatha made a pretence of eating her solitary meal, a light step came behind her, and Faith Temple's hand was laid on her shoulder. Amid her own sorrow, Agatha had pity to give to this lonely girl, orphaned a second time in her short life. Faith was dressed in mourning for her aunt. She drew a chair to Agatha's side, saying, "I knew you could not come to me, and so I came to you. Your last relative is dying, and mine is dead. It is so dreary over there, now, with the thought of uncle, who was always so kind and true, lying silent there, never to speak to me again."

Agatha thought how much happier her life and Faith's might have been, had it not been for the blight of the demijohn.

"I can only stay a moment," said Faith. "It has been many years since I could come to your house, Agatha, to rejoice with those who rejoiced; but God has taught me to

“weep with those that weep,” and in all our own unhappiness, we can remember that the miseries of many more can fill our lives with labor and works of charity. My life seems to have been very idle. Why have I not done more to relieve the suffering of which there is so much? Only, perhaps, because I had not learned what it was by my own experience.”

The friends talked for a few minutes longer; then Agatha walked part way home with Faith in the soft, pure moonlight. Her heart was comforted by thinking how, into the darkest night of sorrow, God is able to send light.

“That is a very unfortunate thing about Temple,” said Doctor Hathway, a week later: “his affairs were so involved, that he hardly left anything to Faith; even the house is gone, and the poor child has been used to every luxury.”

Agatha was so engrossed in her cares for John, that she hardly noticed what the doctor was saying.

“Open the west window, Agatha,” said John, on the evening of a fitful April day. Agatha threw the shutters apart.

“The sun is going down in clouds ; it will storm to-morrow. It will be lonely to-morrow for you. What a care and trouble I have been to you, Aga. Don’t you wish I had never been born to distress you ?”

Agatha’s heart was too full to answer ; she hid her face in the curtain of the window by which she stood.

“Only twenty-eight,” said John, “only twenty-eight ; and, Agatha, I had thought to live until life’s almond blossomed white, and I could go to my grave full of days and of honors.”

Still no answer from the broken-hearted watcher by the window.

“Hamilcar made Hannibal swear eternal enmity to Rome. If I had a son, here by my dying bed, he should swear eternal enmity to alcohol. I am going fast, Agatha: if I do not see morning, remember that I have looked back on my life with bitter grief and shame. I cry, ‘I have sinned, I have sinned!’”

“And *how*, in what spirit, do you cry?” asked Agatha, hastening to his side.

“I cannot tell you. Pharaoh, Saul, Judas, David, all cried, ‘I have sinned,’ some in one way, some in another. If you knew what a hard, deceitful heart I have, Agatha, you would not ask for my judgment of myself. I feel drowsy, and I would like you to read to me once more.”

Agatha took her Bible, turned to that golden chapter, the second of Ephesians, and in a clear, steady voice, began to read,—

“And you hath he quickened, who were

dead in trespasses and sins." And one by one, like jewels beyond all cost, fell from her lips the good words unto the end.

"At midnight there was a cry heard,— 'Behold the Bridegroom cometh; go ye forth to meet him.'"

How went John Stafford forth? Who can tell? Was there no oil of divine grace and love in his lamp? or had it kindled to a little flame to meet the Heavenly Bridegroom's eye?

When morning came royally from the purple east, it looked upon Agatha lying in a heavy slumber of exhaustion, after the long months of her patient watching. The dear object of her cares, needing them no longer, was wrapped for his coffined sleep. "Behold her house was left unto her desolate."

Not many days thereafter, Agatha, at the close of the afternoon, went with Nick to the cemetery to a new-made grave. On the stone at its head was carved,

JOHN STAFFORD.

Æt. 28.

Nick planted a root of myrtle, hope's blue flower, on the bare mould, and left Agatha musing by her dead alone.

Agatha was thirty-eight; she had lived long enough for the romance to wear from life, long enough to suffer much, long enough to learn that there is one thing worth living for,—the work of the Lord.

Not far from her were two new-made graves, and Faith Temple sat by them unseen. She came to Agatha at last, and took her hand; they stood silent a little while, then Faith yielded to the grief of years, and bowed her head upon the white stone with bitter throbbing.

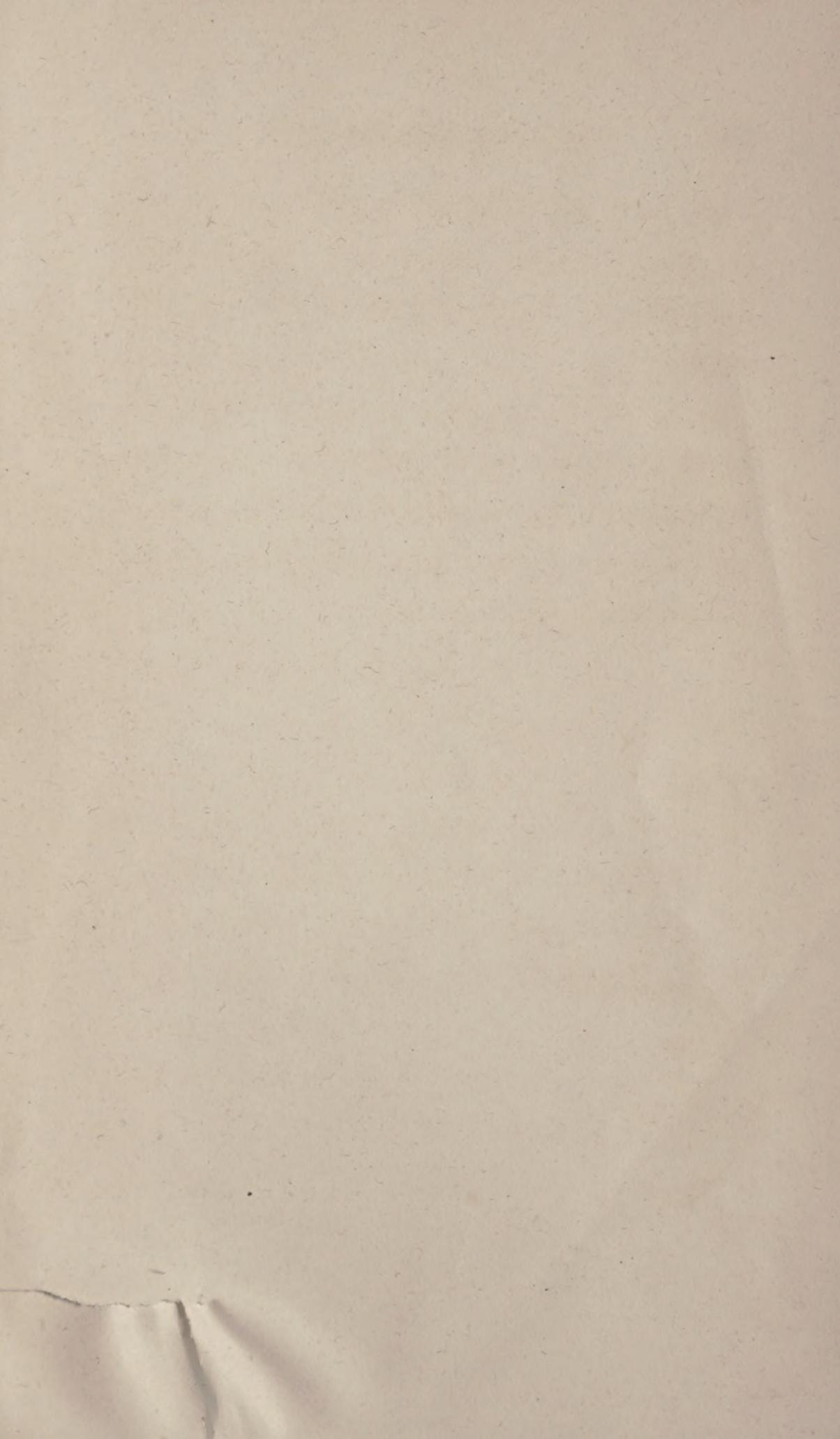
It soothed Agatha to know there was some one beside herself, who thought her brother worth the tribute of a tear.

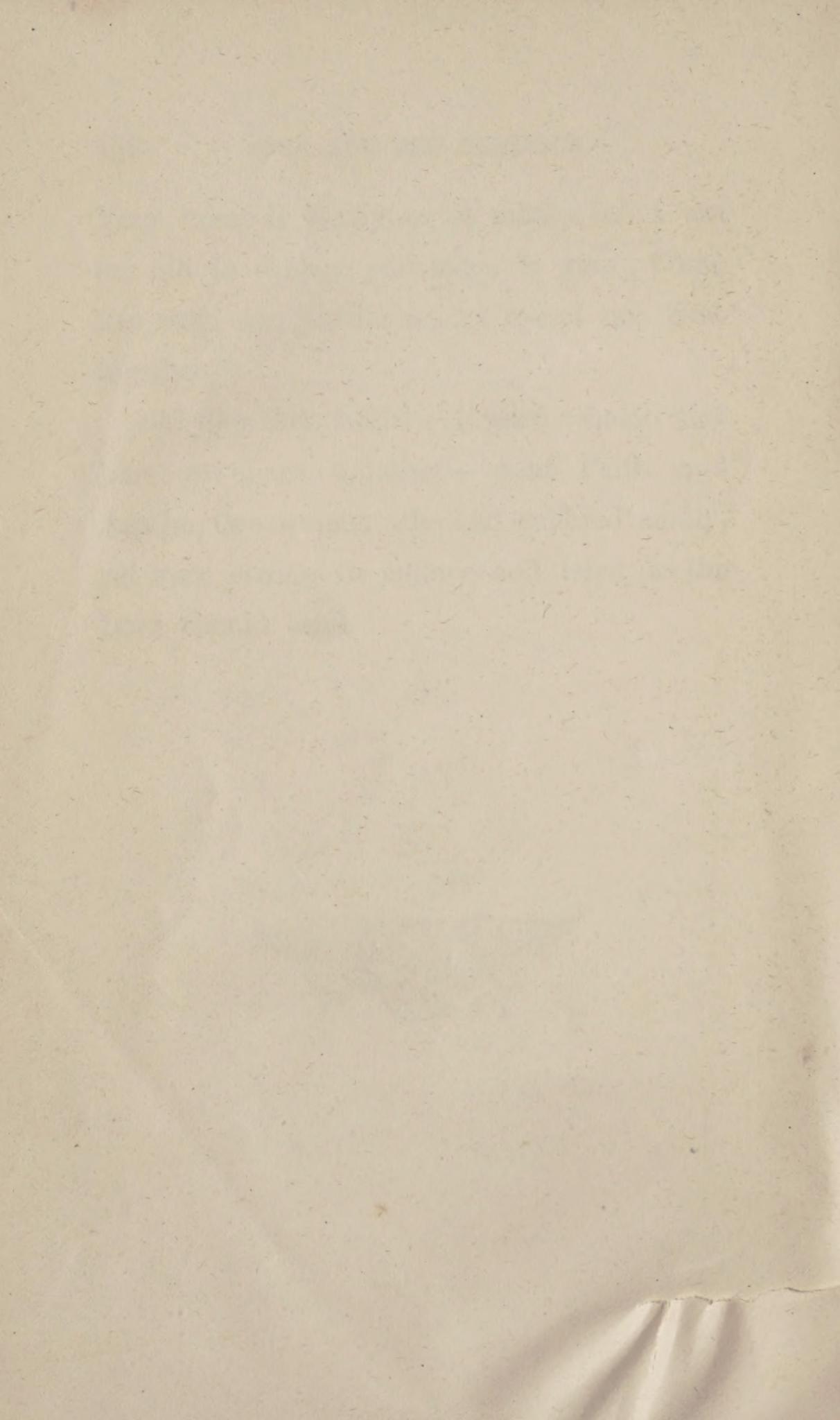
“Faith,” she said, clasping her arm around her friend, “I want you for a sister now.

Your home is lonely, so is mine; but I am too old to change and come to you. Come live with me, Faith; let us spend our lives together."

And then homeward — toward a home they were to share together — went Faith and Agatha, two women who had suffered sorely, yet were strong to endure and labor as the Lord should send.









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